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THE RECOLLECTIONS OF
GEOFFRY HAMLYN

VOL. II.

HENRY KINGSLEY'S NOVELS.

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THE RECOLLECTIONS OF GEOFFRY HAMLYN.

Two volumes.

THE RECOLLECTIONS
OF
GEOFFRY HAMLYN

BY
HENRY KINGSLEY

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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THE RECOLLECTIONS OF GEOFFRY HAMLYN

Chapter I

The golden Vineyard

ON a summer's morning, almost before the dew had left the grass on the north side of the forest, or the be-lated opossum had gone to his nest, in fact just as the East was blazing with its brightest fire, Sam started off for a pleasant canter through the forest, to visit one of their out-station huts, which lay away among the ranges, and which was called, from some old arrangement, now fallen into disuse, "the heifer station."

There was the hut, seen suddenly down a beautiful green vista in the forest, the chimney smoking cheerily. "What a pretty contrast of colours!" says Sam, in a humour for enjoying everything. "Dark brown hut among the green shrubs, and blue smoke rising above all; prettily, too, that smoke hangs about the foliage this still morning, quite in festoons. There's Matt at the door!"

A lean, long-legged, clever-looking fellow, rather wide at the knees, with a brown complexion, and not unpleasant expression of face, stood before the door plaiting a cracker for his stockwhip. He looked pleased when he saw Sam, and indeed it must be a surly fellow indeed, who did not greet Sam's honest face with a smile. Never a dog but wagged his tail when he caught Sam's eye.

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"You're abroad early this morning, sir," said the man ;
"nothing the matter, is there, sir ?"

"Nothing," said Sam, "save that one of Captain Brentwood's bulls is missing, and I came out to tell you to have an extra look round."

"I'll attend to it, sir."

"Hi ! Matt," said Sam, "you look uncommonly smart."

Matt bent down his head, and laughed, in a rather sheepish sort of way.

"Well, you see, sir, I was coming in to the home station to see if the Major could spare me for a few days."

"What, going a courting, eh ? Well, I'll make that all right for you. Who is the lady,—eh ?"

"Why, it's Elsy Macdonald, I believe."

"Elsy Macdonald !" said Sam.

"Ay, yes, sir. I know what you mean, but she ain't like her sister ; and that was more Mr. Charles Hawker's fault than her own. No ; Elsy is good enough for me, and I'm not very badly off, and begin to fancy I would like some better sort of welcome in the evening than what a cranky old brute of a hut-keeper can give me. So I think I shall bring her home."

"I wish you well, Matt," said Sam ; "I hope you are not going to leave us, though."

"No fear, sir ; Major Buckley is too good a master for that !"

"Well, I'll get the hut coopered up a bit for you, and you shall be as comfortable as circumstances will permit. Good morning."

"Good morning, sir ; I hope I may see you happily married yourself some of these days."

Sam laughed ; "that would be a fine joke," he thought, "but why shouldn't it be, eh ? I suppose it must come some time or another. I shall begin to look out ; I don't expect I shall be very easily suited. Heigh ho !"

I expect, however, Mr. Sam, that you are just in the state of mind to fall headlong in love with the first girl

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you meet with a nose on her face ; let us hope, therefore, that she may be eligible.

But here is home again, and here is the father standing majestic and broad in the verandah, and the mother with her arm round his neck, both waiting to give him a hearty morning's welcome. And there is Doctor Mulhaus kneeling in spectacles before his new *Grevillea Victoriæ*, the first bud of which is bursting into life ; and the dogs catch sight of him and dash forward, barking joyfully ; and as the ready groom takes his horse, and the fat house-keeper looks out all smiles, and retreats to send in breakfast, Sam thinks to himself, that he could not leave his home and people, not for the best wife in broad Australia ; but then, you see, he knew no better.

"What makes my boy look so happy this morning ?" asked his mother. "Has the bay mare foaled, or have you negotiated James Brentwood's young dog ? Tell us, that we may participate."

"None of these things have happened, mother ; but I feel in rather a holiday humour, and I'm thinking of going down to Garoopna this morning, and spending a day or two with Jim."

"I will throw a shoe after you for luck," said his mother. "See, the Doctor is calling you."

Sam went to the Doctor, who was intent on his flower. "Look here, my boy ; here is something new : the handsomest of the *Grevilleas*, as I live. It has opened since I was here."

"Ah !" said Sam, "this is the one that came from the Quartz Ranges, last year, is it not ? It has not flowered with you before."

"If Linnæus wept and prayed over the first piece of English furze which he saw," said the Doctor, "what everlasting smelling-bottle hysterics he would have gone into in this country ! I don't sympathise with his tears much, though, myself ; though a new flower is a source of the greatest pleasure to me."

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"And so you are going to Garoopna, Sam?" said his father, at breakfast. "Have you heard, my dear, when the young lady is to come home?"

"Next month, I understand, my dear," said Mrs. Buckley. "When she does come I shall go over and make her a visit."

"What is her name, by the bye?" asked the Doctor.

"Alice."

So behold Sam starting for his visit. The very Brummel of bush-dandies. Hunt might have made his well-fitting cord breeches, Hoby might have made those black-top boots, and Chifney might have worn them before royalty; and not been ashamed. It is too hot for coat or waistcoat; so he wears his snow-white shirt, topped by a blue "bird's-eye-handkerchief," and keeps his coat in his valise, to be used as occasion shall require. His costume is completed with a cabbage-tree hat, neither too new nor too old; light, shady, well ventilated, and three pounds ten, the production, after months of labour, of a private in her Majesty's Fortieth Regiment of Foot: not with long streaming ribands down his back, like a Pitt Street bully, but with short and modest ones as becomes a gentleman,—altogether as fine a looking young fellow, as well dressed, and as well mounted too, as you will find on the country side.

Let me say a word about his horse, too; horse Widderin. None ever knew what that horse had cost Sam. The Major even had a delicacy about asking. I can only discover by inquiry that, at one time, about a year before this, there came to the Major's a traveller, an Irishman by nation, who bored them all by talking about a certain "Arcturus" colt, which had been dropped to a happy proprietor by his mare "Larkspur," among the Shoalhaven gullies; described by him as a colt the like of which was never seen before; as indeed he should be, for his sire Arcturus, as all the world knows, was bought up by the great Hunter-river horse-breeder from the Duke of

C——; while his dam, Larkspur, had for grandsire the great Bombshell himself. What more would you have than that, unless you would like to drive Veno in our dog-cart? However, it so happened that, soon after the Irishman's visit, Sam went away on a journey, and came back riding a new horse; which when the Major saw, he whistled, but discreetly said nothing. A very large colt he was, with a neck like a rainbow, set into a splendid shoulder, and a marvellous way of throwing his legs out;—very dark chestnut in colour, almost black, with longish ears, and an eye so full, honest, and impudent, that it made you laugh in his face. Widderin, Sam said was his name, price and history being suppressed; called after Mount Widderin, to the northward there, whose loftiest sublime summit bends over like a horse's neck, with two peaked crags for ears. And the Major comes somehow to connect this horse with the Arcturus colt mentioned by our Irish friend, and observes that Sam takes to wearing his old clothes for a twelvemonth, and never seems to have any ready money. We shall see some day whether or no this horse will carry Sam ten miles, if required, on such direful emergency too as falls to the lot of few men. However, this is all to come. Now in holiday clothes and in holiday mind, the two noble animals cross the paddock, and so down by the fence towards the river; towards the old gravel ford you may remember years ago. Here is the old flood, spouting and streaming as of yore, through the basalt pillars. There stand the three fern trees, too, above the dark scrub on the island. Now up the rock bank, and away across the breezy plains due North.

Brushing through the long grass tussocks, he goes his way singing, his dog Rover careering joyously before him. The horse is clearly for a gallop, but it is too hot to-day. The tall, flat-topped volcanic hill which hung before him like a grey faint cloud when he started, now rears its fluted columns overhead, and now is getting dim again behind him. But ere noon is high he once more hears

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the brawling river beneath his feet, and Garoopna is before him on the opposite bank.

The river, as it left Major Buckley's at Baroona, made a sudden bend to the west, a great arc, including with its minor windings nearly twenty-five miles, over the chord of which arc Sam had now been riding, making, from point to point, ten miles or thereabouts. The Mayfords' station, also, lay to the left of him, being on the curved side of the arc, about five miles from Baroona. The reader may, if he please, remember this.

Garoopna is an exceedingly pretty station ; in fact, one of the most beautiful I have ever seen. It stands at a point where the vast forests, which surround the mountains in a belt, from ten to twenty miles broad, run down into the plains and touch the river. As at Baroona, the stream runs in through a deep cleft in the table-land, which here, though precipitous on the eastern bank, on the western breaks away into a small natural amphitheatre bordered by fine hanging woods, just in advance of which, about two hundred yards from the river, stands the house, a long, low building densely covered with creepers of all sorts, and fronted by a beautiful garden. Right and left of it are the woolsheds, sheepyards, stockyards, men's huts, &c. ; giving it almost the appearance of a little village ; and behind the wooded ranges begin to rise, in some places broken beautifully by sheer scarps of grey rock. The forest crosses the river a little way ; so that Sam, gradually descending from the plains to cross, went the last quarter of a mile through a shady sandy forest tract, fringed with bracken, which led down to a broad crossing place, where the river sparkled under tall over-arching red gums and box-trees ; and then following the garden fence, found himself before a deep cool-looking porch, in a broad neatly-kept courtyard behind the house.

A groom* came out and took his horse. Rover has

* Do not let Bob or Tom, when they read this book in the sixteenth edition, before the harness-room stove, suppose that an

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enough to do ; for there are three or four sheep dogs in the yard, who walk round him on tiptoe, slowly, with their frills out and their tails arched, growling. Rover, also, walks about on tiptoe, arches his tail, and growls with the best of them. He knows that the slightest mistake would be disastrous, and so manœuvres till he gets to the porch, where, a deal of gravel having been kicked backwards, in the same way as the ancients poured out their wine when they drank a toast, or else (as I think is more probable) as a symbol that animosities were to be buried, Rover is admitted as a guest, and Sam feels it safe to enter the house.

A cool, shady hall, hung round with coats, hats, stock-whips ; a gun in the corner, and on a slab, the most beautiful nosegay you can imagine. Remarkable that for a bachelor's establishment ;—but there is no time to think about it, for a tall, comfortable-looking housekeeper, whom Sam has never seen before, comes in from the kitchen and curtseys.

“ Captain Brentwood not at home, is he ? ” said Sam.

“ No, sir ! Away on the run with Mr. James.”

“ Oh ! very well,” says Sam ; “ I am going to stay a few days.”

“ Very well, sir ; will you take anything before lunch ? ”

“ Nothing, thank you.”

“ Miss Alice is somewhere about, sir. I expect her in every minute.”

“ Miss Alice ! ” says Sam, astonished. “ Is she come home ? ”

“ Came home last week, sir. Will you walk in and sit down ? ”

Sam got his coat out of his valise, and went in. He wished that he had put on his plain blue necktie instead of the blue one with white spots. He would have liked to

Australian groom resembles in any way the very neat young man who follows the young ladies in their canters. The dirtiest helper at a university stable would come nearer the mark.

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have worn his new yellow riding-trousers, instead of breeches and boots. He hoped his hair was in order, and tried to arrange his handsome brown curls without a glass, but, in the end, concluded that things could not be mended now, so he looked round the room.

What a charming room it was ! A couple of good pictures, and several fine prints on the walls. Over the chimney-piece, a sword, and an old gold-laced cap, on which Sam looked with reverence. Three French windows opened on to a dark cool verandah, beyond which was a beautiful flower-garden. The floor of the room, uncarpeted, shone dark and smooth, and the air was perfumed by vases of magnificent flowers, a hundred pounds worth of them, I should say, if you could have taken them to Covent-garden that December morning. But what took Sam's attention more than anything was an open piano, in a shady recess, and on the keys a little fairy white glove.

"White kid gloves, eh, my lady?" says Sam; "that don't look well." So he looked through the book-shelves, and, having lighted on "Boswell's Johnson," proceeded into the verandah. A colley she-dog was lying at one end, who banged her tail against the floor in welcome, but was too utterly prostrated by the heat and by the persecution of her puppy to get up and make friends. The pup, however, a ball of curly black wool, with brown-striped face, who was sitting on the top of her with his head on one side, seemed to conclude that a game of play was to be got out of Sam, and came blundering towards him; but Sam was, by this time, deep in a luxurious rocking-chair, so the puppy stopped half way, and did battle with a great black tarantula spider who happened to be abroad on business.

Sam went to the club with his immortal namesake, bullied Bennet Langton, argued with Beauclerk, put down Goldsmith, and extinguished Boswell. But it was too hot to read; so he let the book fall on his lap, and lay a dreaming.

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What a delicious verandah is this to dream in ! Through the tangled passion-flowers, jessamines and magnolias, what a soft gleam of bright hazy distance, over the plains and far away ! The deep river-glen cleaves the table-land, which, here and there, swells into breezy downs. Beyond, miles away to the North, is a great forest-barrier, above which there is a blaze of late snow, sending strange light aloft into the burning haze. All this is seen through an arch in the dark mass of verdure which clothes the trellis-work, only broken through in this one place, as though to make a frame for the picture. He leans back, and gives himself up to watching trifles.

See here. A magpie comes furtively out of the house with a key in his mouth, and, seeing Sam, stops to consider if he is likely to betray him. On the whole, he thinks not ; so he hides the key in a crevice, and whistles a tune.

Now enters a cockatoo, waddling along comfortably and talking to himself. He tries to enter into conversation with the magpie, who, however, cuts him dead, and walks off to look at the prospect.

Flop ! flop ! A great foolish-looking kangaroo comes through the house and peers round him. The cockatoo addresses a few remarks to him, which he takes no notice of, but goes blundering out into the garden, right over the contemplative magpie, who gives him two or three indignant pecks on his clumsy feet, and sends him flying down the gravel walk.

Two bright-eyed little kangaroo rats come out of their box peering and blinking. The cockatoo finds an audience in them, for they sit listening to him, now and then catching a flea, or rubbing the backs of their heads with their fore-paws. But a buck 'possum, who stealthily descends by a pillar from unknown realms of mischief on the top of the house, evidently discredits cockey's stories, and departs down the garden so see if he can find something to eat.

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An old cat comes up the garden walk, accompanied by a wicked kitten, who ambushes round the corner of the flowerbed, and pounces out on her mother, knocking her down and severely maltreating her. But the old lady picks herself up without a murmur, and comes into the verandah followed by her unnatural offspring, ready for any mischief. The kangaroo rats retire into their box, and the cockatoo, rather nervous, lays himself out to be agreeable.

But the puppy, born under an unlucky star, who has been watching all these things from behind his mother, thinks at last, "Here is some one to play with," so he comes staggering forth and challenges the kitten to a lark.

She receives him with every symptom of disgust and abhorrence ; but he, regardless of all spitting, and tail swelling, rolls her over, spurring and swearing, and makes believe he will worry her to death. Her scratching and biting tell but little on his woolly hide, and he seems to have the best of it out and out, till a new ally appears unexpectedly, and quite turns the tables. The magpie hops up, ranges alongside of the combatants, and catches the puppy such a dig over the tail as sends him howling to his mother with a flea in his ear.

Sam lay sleepily amused by this little drama ; then he looked at the bright green arch which separated the dark verandah from the bright hot garden. The arch was darkened, and looking, he saw something which made his heart move strangely, something that he has not forgotten yet, and never will.

Under the arch between the sunlight and the shade, bareheaded, dressed in white, stood a girl, so amazingly beautiful, that Sam wondered for a few moments whether he was asleep or awake. Her hat, which she had just taken off, hung on her left arm, and with her delicate right hand she arranged a vagrant tendril of the passion-flower, which in its luxuriant growth had broken bounds and fallen from its place above.—A girl so beautiful that I

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in all my life never saw her superior. They showed me the other day, in a carriage in the park, one they said was the most beautiful girl in England, a descendant of I know not how many noblemen. But, looking back to the times I am speaking of now, I said at once and decidedly, "Alice Brentwood twenty years ago was more beautiful than she."

A Norman style of beauty, I believe you would call it. Light hair, deep brilliant blue eyes, and a very fair complexion. Beauty and high-bred grace in every limb and every motion. She stood there an instant on tiptoe, with the sunlight full upon her, while Sam, buried in gloom, had time for a delighted look, before she stepped into the verandah and saw him.

She floated towards him through the deep shadow. "I think," she said in the sweetest, most musical little voice, "that you are Mr. Buckley. If so, you are a very old friend of mine by report." So she held out her little hand, and with one bold kind look from the happy eyes, finished Sam for life.

Father and mother, retire into the chimney corner and watch. Your day is done. Doctor Mulhaus, put your good advice into your pocket and smoke your pipe. Here is one who can exert a greater power for good or evil than all of you put together. It was written of old,—“A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his——” Hallo! I am getting on rather fast, I am afraid.

He had risen to meet her. "And you, Miss Brentwood," he said, "are tolerably well known to me. Do you know now that I believe by an exertion of memory I could tell you the year and the month when you began to learn the harp? My dear old friend Jim has kept me quite *au fait* with all your accomplishments."

"I hope you are not disappointed in me," said Alice, laughing.

"No," said Sam. "I think rather the contrary. Are you?"

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"I have not had time to tell yet," she said. "I will see how you behave at lunch, which we shall have in half an hour *tête-à-tête*. You have been often here before, I believe? Do you see much change?"

"Not much. I noticed a new piano, and a little glove that I had never seen before. Jim's menagerie of wild beasts is as numerous as ever, I see. He would have liked to be in Noah's Ark."

"And so would you and I, Mr. Buckley," she answered, laughing, "if we had been caught in the flood."

Good gracious! Think of being in Noah's Ark with her!

"You find them a little troublesome, don't you, Miss Brentwood?"

"Well, it requires a good deal of administrative faculty to keep the kitten and the puppy from open collision, and to prevent the magpie from pecking out the cockatoo's eye and hiding it in the flowerbed. Last Sunday morning he (the magpie) got into my father's room, and stole thirty-one shillings and sixpence. We got it all back but half a sovereign, and that we shall never see."

The bird thus alluded to broke into a gush of melody, so rich, full, and metallic, that they both turned to look at him. Having attracted attention, he began dancing, crooning a little song to himself, as though he would say, "I know where it is." And lastly he puffed out his breast, put back his bill, and swore two or three oaths that would have disgraced a London scavenger, with such remarkable distinctness too, that there was no misunderstanding him; so Sam's affectation of not having caught what the bird said, was a dead failure.

"Mr. Buckley," said she, "if you will excuse me I will go and see about lunch. Can you amuse yourself there for half an hour?" Well, he would try. So he retired again to the rocking-chair, about ten years older than when he rose from it. For he had grown from a boy into a man.

He had fallen over head and ears in love, and all in five

minutes. Fallen deeply, seriously in love, to the exclusion of all other sublunary matters, before he had well had time to notice whether she spoke with an Irish brogue or a Scotch (happily she did neither). Sudden, you say : well, yes ; but, in lat. 34° , and lower, whether in the southern or northern atmosphere, these sort of affairs come on with a rapidity and violence only equalled by the thunder-storms of those regions, and utterly surprising to you who perhaps read this book in 52° north, or perhaps higher. I once went to a ball with as free-and-easy, heart-whole a young fellow as any I know, and agreed with him to stay half an hour, and then come away and play pool. In twenty-five minutes by my watch, which keeps time like a ship's chronometer, that man was in the tragic or cut-throat stage of the passion with a pretty little thing of forty, a cattle-dealer's widow, who stopped *his* pool-playing for a time, until she married the great iron-monger in George Street. Romeo and Juliet's little matter was just as sudden, and very Australian in many points. Only mind, that Romeo, had he lived in Australia, instead of taking poison, would probably have

"Took to drinking ratafia, and thought of poor Miss Baily,"

for full twenty-four hours after the catastrophe.

At least such would have been the case in many instances, but not in all. With some men these suddenly-conceived passions last their lives, and, I should be inclined to say longer, were there not strong authority against it.

But Sam ? He saw the last twinkle of her white gown disappear, and then leant back and tried to think. He could only say to himself, "By Jove, I wonder if I can ever bring her to like me. I wish I had known she was here ; I'd have dressed myself better. She is a precious superior girl. She might come to like me in time. Heigh ho !"

The idea of his having a rival, or of any third person

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stepping in between him and the young lady to whom he had thrown his handkerchief, never entered into his Sultan-ship's head. Also, when he came to think about it, he really saw no reason why she should not be brought to think well of him. "As well me as another," said he to himself; "that's where it is. She must marry somebody, you know!"

Why is she gone so long? He begins to doubt whether he has not after all been asleep and dreaming. There she comes again, however, for the arch under the creepers is darkened again, and he looks up with a pleasant smile upon his face to greet her.

God save us! What imp's trick is this? There, in the porch, in the bright sun, where she stood not an hour ago in all her beauty and grace, stands a hideous, old savage, black as Tophet, grinning; showing the sharp gap-teeth in her apish jaws, her lean legs shaking with old age and rheumatism.

The colley shakes out her frill, and, raising the hair all down her back, stands grinning and snarling, while her puppy barks pot-valiantly between her legs. The little kangaroo rats ensconce themselves once more in their box, and gaze out amazed from their bright little eyes. The cockatoo hooks and clambers up to a safe place in the trellis, and Sam, after standing thunderstruck for a moment, asks, what she wants?

"Make a light," * says the old girl, in a pathetic squeak. Further answer she makes none, but squats down outside, and begins a petulant whine: sure sign that she has a tale of woe to unfold, and is going to ask for something.

"Can that creature," thinks Sam, "be of the same species as the beautiful Alice Brentwood? Surely not! There seems as much difference between them as between an angel and an ordinary good woman." Hard to believe,

* "Make a light," in blackfellow's gibberish, means simply "See." Here it means, "I'm only come to see how you are getting on," or something of that sort.

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truly, Sam ; but perhaps, in some of the great European cities, or even nearer home, in some of the prison barracks, you may chance to find a white woman or two fallen as low as that poor, starved, ill-treated, filthy old savage !

Alice comes out once more, and brings sunshine with her. She goes up to the old lubra with a look of divine compassion on her beautiful face ; the old woman's whine grows louder as she rocks herself to and fro. "Yah marah, Yah boorah, Oh boora Yah ! Yah Ma !"

"What ! old Sally !" says the beautiful girl. "What is the matter ? Have you been getting waddy again ?"

"Baal !" says she, with a petulant burst of grief.

"What is it, then ?" says Alice. "Where is the gown I gave you ?"

Alice had evidently vibrated the right chord. The "Yarah Moorah" coronach was begun again ; and then suddenly, as if her indignation had burst bounds, she started off with a shrillness and rapidity astonishing to one not accustomed to blackfellows, into something like the following : "Oh Yah (very loud), oh Mah ! Barkma-burrawurrah, Barkmamurrahwurrah Oh Ya Barkmanur-rawah Yee (in a scream. Then a pause). Oh Mooroo (pause). Oh hinaray (pause). Oh Barknamurrwurrah Yee !"

Alice looked as if she understood every word of it, and waited till the poor old soul had "blown off the steam," and then asked again :

"And what has become of the gown, Sally ?"

"Oh dear ! Young lubra, Betty (big thief that one) tear it up and stick it along a fire. Oh, plenty cold this old woman. Oh, plenty hungry this old woman. Oh, Yarah Moorah," &c.

"There ! go round to the kitchen," said Alice, "and get something to eat. Is it not abominable, Mr. Buckley ? I cannot give anything to this old woman but the young lubras take it from her. However, I will 'put the screw on them.' They shall have nothing from me till

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they treat her better. It goes to my heart to see a woman of that age, with nothing to look forward to but kicks and blows. I have tried hard to make her understand something of the next world : but I can't get it out of her head that when she dies she will go across the water and come back a young white woman with plenty of money. Mr. Sandford, the missionary, says he has never found one who could be made to comprehend the existence of God. However, I came to call you to lunch ; will you give me your arm ? ”

Such a self-possessed, intrepid little maiden, not a bit afraid of him, but seemed to understand and trust him so thoroughly. Not all the mock-modesty and blushing in the world would have won him half so surely, as did her bold, quiet, honest look. Although a very young man, and an inexperienced, Sam could see what a candid, honest, gentle soul looked at him from those kind blue eyes ; and she, too, saw something in Sam's broad noble face which attracted her marvellously, and in all innocence she told him so, plump and plain, as they were going into the house.

“ I fancy I shall like you very much, Mr. Buckley. We ought to be good friends, you know ; your father saved the lives of my father and uncle.”

“ I never heard of that before,” said Sam.

“ I dare say not,” said Alice. “ Your father is not the man to speak of his own noble deeds ; yet he ran out of his square and pulled my father and uncle almost from under the hoofs of the French cavalry at Waterloo. It makes my cheeks tingle to tell of it now.”

Indeed it did. Sam thought that if it brought such a beautiful flush to her face, and such a flash from her eyes, whenever she told it, that he would get her to tell it again more than once.

But lunch ! Don't let us starve our new pair of turtle-doves, in the outset. Sam is but a growing lad, and needs carbon for his muscles, lime for his bones, and all

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that sort of thing ; a glass of wine won't do him any harm either, and let us hope that his new passion is not of such lamentable sort as to prevent his using a knife and fork with credit and satisfaction to himself.

Here, in the dark, cool parlour, stands a banquet for the gods, white damask, pretty bright china, and clean silver. In the corner of the table is a frosted claret-jug, standing, with freezing politeness, upright, his hand on his hip, waiting to be poured out. In the centre, the grandfather of watermelons, half-hidden by peaches and pomegranates, the whole heaped over by a confusion of ruby cherries (oh, for Lance to paint it !). Are you hungry, though ? If so, here is a mould of potted-head and a cold wild duck, while, on the side-board, I see a bottle of pale ale. My brother, let us breakfast in Scotland, lunch in Australia, and dine in France, till our lives' end.

And the banquet being over, she said, as pleasantly as possible, " Now, I know you want to smoke in the verandah. For my part, I should like to bring my work there and sit with you, but, if you had rather not have me, you have only to say that ' you could not think,' &c. &c., and I will obediently take myself off."

But Sam didn't say that. He said that he couldn't conceive anything more delightful, if she was quite sure she did not mind.

Not she, indeed ! So she brought her work out, and they sat together. A cool wind came up, bending the flowers, swinging the creepers to and fro, and raising a rushing sound, like the sea, from the distant forest. The magpie having been down the garden when the wind came on, and having been blown over, soon joined them in a very captious frame of mind ; and, when Alice dropped a ball of red worsted, he seized it as lawful prize, and away in the house with a hop and a flutter. So both Sam and Alice had to go after him, and hunt him under the sofa, and the bird, finding that he must yield, dropped the ball suddenly, and gave Sam two vicious digs on the fin-

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gers to remember him by. But when Alice just touched his hand in taking it from him, he wished it had been a whipsnake instead of a magpie.

So the ball of worsted was recovered, and they sat down again. He watched her nimble fingers on the delicate embroidery ; he glanced at her quiet face and down-turned eyelids, wondering who she was thinking of. Suddenly she raised her eyes and caught him in the fact. You could not swear she blushed ; it might only be a trifling reflection from one of the red China roses that hung between her and the sun ; yet, when she spoke, it was not quite with her usual self-possession ; a little hurriedly perhaps.

“Are you going to be a soldier, as your father was?”

Sam had thought for an instant of saying “yes,” and then to prove his words true of going to Sydney, and enlisting in the “Half Hundred.”* Truth, however, prompting him to say “no,” he compromised the matter by saying he had not thought of it.

“I am rather glad of that, do you know,” she said. “Unless in India, now, a man had better be anything than a soldier. I am afraid my brother Jim will be begging for a commission some day. I wish he would stay quietly at home.”

That was comforting. He gave up all thoughts of enlisting at once. But now the afternoon shadows were beginning to slant longer and longer, and it was nearly time that the Captain and Jim should make their appearance. So Alice proposed to walk out to meet them, and as Sam did not say no, they went forth together.

Down the garden, faint with the afternoon scents of the flowers before the western sun, among petunias and roses, oleander and magnolia ; here a towering Indian lily, there a thicket of scarlet geranium and fuchsia. By shady young orange trees, covered with fruit and blossom, between rows of trellised vines, bearing rich promise of a purple vintage. Among fig trees and pomegranates, and

* The fiftieth, buffs.

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so leaving the garden, along the dry slippery grass, towards the hoarse rushing river, both silent till they reached it. There is a silence that is golden.

They stood gazing on the foaming tide an instant, and then Alice said,—

“My father and Jim will come home by the track across there. Shall we cross and meet them? We can get over just below.”

A little lower down, all the river was collected into one headlong race; and a giant tree, undermined by winter floods, had fallen from one bank to the other, offering a giddy footway across the foaming water.

“Now,” said Alice, “if you will go over, I will follow you.”

So he ran across, and then looked back to see the beautiful figure tripping fearlessly over, with outstretched arms, and held out his great brown hand to take her tiny fingers as she stepped down from the upturned roots, on to the soft white sand. He would like to have taken them again, to help her up the bank, but she sprang up like a deer, and would not give him the opportunity. Then they had a merry laugh at the magpie, who had fluttered down all this way before them, to see if they were on a foraging expedition, and if there were any plunder going, and now could not summon courage to cross the river, but stood crooning and cursing by the brink. Then they sauntered away through the forest, side by side, along the sandy track, among the knolls of bracken, with the sunlit boughs overhead whispering knowingly to one another in the evening breeze, as they passed beneath.—An evening walk long remembered by both of them.

“Oh see ye not that pleasant road,
That winds along the ferny brae?
Oh that's the road to fairy land,
Where thou and I this e'en must gae.”

“And so you cannot remember England, Mr. Buckley?” says Alice.

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“ Oh dear, no. Stay though, I am speaking too fast. I can remember some few places. I remember a steep, red road, that led up to the church, and have some dim recollection of a vast grey building, with a dark porch, which must have been the church itself. I can see, too, at this moment, a broad green flat, beside a creek, which was covered with yellow and purple flowers, which mother and I made into nosegays. That must be the place my father speaks of as the Hatherleigh Meadows, where he used to go fishing, and, although I must have been there often, yet I can only remember it on one occasion, when he emptied out a basket of fish on the grass for me to look at. My impression of England is, that everything was of a brighter colour than here ; and they tell me I am right.”

“ A glorious country,” said Alice ; “ what would I give to see it ?—so ancient and venerable, and yet so amazingly young and vigorous. It seems like a waste of existence for a man to stay here tending sheep, when his birthright is that of an Englishman : the right to move among his peers, and find his fit place in the greatest empire in the world. Never had any woman such a noble destiny before her as this young lady who has just ascended the throne.”

But the conversation changed here, and her Majesty escaped criticism for the time. They came to an open space in the forest, thickly grown with thickets of bracken fern, prickly acacia, and here and there a solitary dark-foliaged lightwood. In the centre rose a few blackened posts, the supports of what had once been a hut, and as you looked, you were surprised to see an English rose or two, flowering among the dull-coloured prickly shrubs, which were growing around. A place, as any casual traveller would have guessed, which had a history, and Sam, seeing Alice pause, asked her, “ what old hut was this ? ”

“ This,” she said, “ is the Donovans’ old station, where they were burnt out by the blacks.”

Sam knew the story well enough, but he would like to

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hear her tell it; so he made believe to have heard some faint reports of the occurrence, and what could she do, but give him the particulars?

"They had not been here a year," she said; "and Mrs. Donovan had been confined only three days; there was not a soul on the station but herself, her son Murtagh, and Miss Burke. All day the blackfellows were prowling about, and getting more and more insolent, and at night, just as Murtagh shut the door, they raised their yell, and rushed against it. Murtagh Donovan and Miss Burke had guessed what was coming all day, but had kept it from the sick woman, and now, when the time came, they were cool and prepared. They had two double-barrelled guns loaded with slugs, and with these they did such fearful execution from two loop-holes they had made in the slabs, that the savages quickly retired; but poor Miss Burke, incautiously looking out to get a shot, received a spear wound in her shoulder, which she bears the mark of to this day. But the worst was to come. The blackfellows mounted on the roof, tried to take off the bark, and throw their spears into the hut, but here they were foiled again. Wherever a sheet of bark was seen to move they watched, and on the first appearance of an enemy, a charge of shot at a few yards' distance told with deadly effect. Mrs. Donovan, who lay in bed and saw the whole, told my father that Lesbia Burke loaded and fired with greater rapidity and precision than did her cousin. A noble woman, I say."

"Good old Lesbia!" said Sam; "and how did it end?"

"Why, the foolish blacks fired the woolshed, and brought the Delisles upon them; they tried to fire the roof of the hut, but it was raining too hard: otherwise it would have gone hard with poor Miss Burke. See, here is a peach-tree they planted, covered with fruit; let us gather some; it is pretty good, for the Donovans have kept it pruned in memory of their escape."

"But the hut was not burnt," said Sam, "where did it stand?"

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“That pile of earth there, is the remains of the old turf chimney. They moved across the river after it happened.”

But peaches, when they grow on a high tree, must be climbed for, particularly if a young and pretty girl expresses a wish for them. And so it fell out, that Sam was soon astride of one of the lower boughs, throwing the fruit down to Alice, who put them one by one into the neatest conceivable little basket that hung on her arm.

And so they were employed, busy and merry, when they heard a loud cheery voice, which made both of them start.

“Quite a scene from ‘Paradise Lost,’ I declare; only Eve ought to be up the tree handing down the apples to Adam, and not *vice versa*. I miss a carpet snake, too, who would represent the Deuce, and make the thing complete.—Sam Buckley, how are you?”

It was Captain Brentwood who had come on them so inaudibly along the sandy track, on horseback, and beside him was son Jim, looking rather mischievously at Sam, who did not show to the best of advantage up in the peach-tree; but, having descended, and greetings being exchanged, father and son rode on to dress for dinner, the hour for which was now approaching, leaving Sam and Alice to follow at leisure, which they did; for Captain Brentwood and Jim had time to dress and meet in the verandah, before they saw the pair come sauntering up the garden.

“Father,” said Jim, taking the Captain’s hand, “how would that do?”

“Marvellous well, I should say;” replied the Captain.

“And so I think, too,” said Jim. “Hallo! you two; dinner is ready, so look sharp.”

After dinner the Captain retired silently to the chimney-corner, and read his book, leaving the three young people to amuse themselves as they would. Nothing the Captain liked so much as quiet, while he read some abstruse work on Gunnery, or some scientific voyage; but I am sorry to say he had got very little quiet of an evening since Alice

came home, and Jim had got some one to chatter to. This evening, however, seemed to promise well, for Alice brought out a great book of coloured prints, and the three sat down to turn them over, Jim, of course, you know, being in the middle.

The book was "Wild Sports of the East," a great volume of coloured lithographs, worth some five-and-twenty guineas. One never sees such books as that now-a-days, somehow; people, I fancy, would not pay that price for them. What modern travels have such plates as the old editions of "Cook's Voyages"? The number of illustrated books is increased tenfold, but they are hardly improved in quality.

But Sam, I think, would have considered any book beautiful in such company. "This," said Alice, "is what we call the 'Tiger Book'—why, you will see directly.—You turn over, Jim, and don't crease the pages."

So Jim turned over, and kept them laughing by his simple remarks, more often affected than real, I suspect. Now they went through the tangled jungle, and seemed to hear the last mad howl of the dying tiger, as the elephant knelt and pinned him to the ground with his tusks. Now they chased a lordly buffalo from his damp lair in the swamp; now they saw the English officers flying along on their Arabs through the high grass with well-poised spears after the snorting hog. They have come unexpectedly on a terrible old tiger; one of the horses swerves, and a handsome young man, losing his seat, seems just falling into the monster's jaws while the pariah dogs scud away terrified through the grass.

"That chap will be eaten immediately," says Jim.

"He has been in that position ever since I can remember," says Alice; "so I think he is pretty safe."

Now they are with the British army on the march. A scarlet bar stretches across the plain, of which the further end is lost in the white mirage—all in order; walking irresistibly on to the conquest of an empire greater than

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Haroun Al Raschid's. So naturally done too, that as you look, you think you see the columns swing as they advance, and hear the heavy, weary tramp of the troops above the din and shouting of the crowd of camp-followers, on camels and elephants, which surrounds them. Beyond the plain the faint blue hills pierce the grey air, barred with a few long white clouds, and far away a gleaming river winds through a golden country spanned with long bridges, and fringed with many a fantastic minaret.

"How I should like to see that!" said Alice.

"Would you like to be a countess," said Jim, "and ride on an elephant in a howitzer?"

"Howdah, you goose!" said Alice. "Besides, that is not a countess; that is one of the soldiers' wives. Countesses don't go to India: they stay at home to mind the Queen's clothes."

"What a pleasant job for them," said Jim, "when her Most Gracious Majesty has got the toothache! I wonder whether she wears her crown under her bonnet or over it?"

Captain Brentwood looked up. "My dear boy," he said, "does it not strike you that you are talking nonsense?"

"Did you ever see the old King, father?" said Jim.

"I saw King George the Third many times."

"Ah, but I mean to speak to him."

"Once only, and then he was mad. He was sitting up with her Majesty, waiting for intelligence which I brought. His Royal Highness took the despatches from me, but the King insisted on seeing me."

"And what did he say, father? Do tell us," said Alice eagerly.

"Little enough, my love," said the Captain, leaning back. "He asked, 'Is this the officer who brought the despatches, York?' And his Royal Highness said 'Yes.' Then the King said, 'You bring good news, sir: I was

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going to ask you some questions, but they are all gone out of my head. Go and get your supper; get your supper, sir.' Poor old gentleman. He was a kindly old man, and I had a great respect for him. Alice, sing us a song, my love."

She sang them "The Burial of Sir John Moore" with such perfect taste and pathos that Sam felt as if the candle had gone out when she finished. Then she turned round and said to him, "You ought to like that song; your father was one of the actors in it."

"He has often told me the story," said Sam, "but I never knew what a beautiful one it was till I heard you sing it."

All pleasant evenings must end, and at last she rose to go to bed. But Sam, before he went off to the land of happy dreams, saw that the little white glove which he had noticed in the morning was lying neglected on the floor; so he quietly secured and kept it. And, last year, opening his family Bible to refer to certain entries, now pretty numerous, in the beginning, I found a little white glove pinned to the fly-leaf, which I believe to be the same glove here spoken of.

Chapter II

A Gentleman from the Wars

I NEED hardly say that Sam was sorry when the two days which he had allowed himself for his visit were over. But that evening, when he mentioned the fact that he was going away in the morning, the Captain, Alice, and Jim, all pressed him so eagerly to stay another week, that he consented; the more as there was no earthly reason he knew of why he should go home.

And the second morning from that on which he should have been at home, going out to the stable before break-

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fast, he saw his father come riding over the plain, and, going to meet him, found that he, too, meditated a visit to the Captain.

"I thought you were come after me, father," said Sam. "By the bye, do you know that the Captain's daughter, Miss Alice, is come home?"

"Indeed!" said the Major; "and what sort of a body is she?"

"Oh, she is well enough. Something like Jim. Plays very well on the piano, and all that sort of thing, you know. Sings too."

"Is she pretty?" asked the Major.

"Oh, well, I suppose she is," said Sam. "Yes; I should say that a great many people would consider her pretty."

They had arrived at the door, and the groom had taken the Major's horse, when Alice suddenly stepped out and confronted them.

The Major had been prepared to see a pretty girl, but he was by no means prepared for such a radiant, lovely, blushing creature as stepped out of the darkness into the fresh morning to greet him, clothed in white, bareheaded, with

"A single rose in her hair."

As he told his wife, a few days after, he was struck "all of a heap;" and Sam heard him whisper to himself, "By Jove!" before he went up to Alice and spoke.

"My dear young lady, you and I ought not to be strangers, for I recognise you from my recollections of your mother. Can you guess who I am?"

"I recognise you from my recollections of your son, sir," said Alice, with a sly look at Sam; "I should say that you were Major Buckley."

The Major laughed, and, taking her hand, carried it to his lips; a piece of old-fashioned courtesy she had never experienced before, and which won her heart amazingly.

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"Come, come, Buckley!" said the quiet voice of Captain Brentwood from the dark passage; "what are you at there with my daughter? I shall have to call out and fight some of you young fellows yet, I see."

Alice went in past her father, stopping to give him a kiss, and disappeared into the breakfast-room. The Captain came out, and shook hands warmly with the Major, and said,

"What do you think of her,—eh?"

"I never saw such beauty before," answered the Major; "never, by Jove! I tell you what, Brentwood, I wish she could come out this season in London. Why, she might marry a duke."

"Let us get her a rouge-pot and a French governess, and send her home by the next ship; eh, Buckley?" said the Captain, with his most sardonic smile. "She would be the better for a little polishing; wouldn't she, eh? Too hoydenish and forward, I am afraid; too fond of speaking the truth. Let's have her taught to amble, and mince, and——Bah, come to breakfast!"

The Major laughed heartily at this tirade of the Captain's. He was fond of teasing him, and I believe the Captain liked to be teased by him.

"And what are you three going to do with yourselves to-day, eh?" asked the Captain at breakfast. "It is a matter of total indifference to me, so long as you take yourselves off somewhere, and leave me in peace."

Alice was spokesman:—"We are going up to the Limestone Gates; Mr. Samuel Buckley has expressed a desire to see them, and so Jim and I thought of taking him there."

This was rather a jesuitical speech. The expedition to the Limestone Gates involved a long ride through very pretty scenery, which she herself had proposed. As for Sam, bless you! he didn't care whether they rode east, west, north, or south, so long as he rode beside her; however, having got his cue, he expressed a strong wish to

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examine, geologically, the great band of limestone which alternated with the slate towards the mountains, the more particularly as he knew that the Captain and the Major intended to ride out in another direction, to examine some new netting for sheep-yards which the Captain had imported.

If Major Buckley thought Alice beautiful as he had seen her in the morning, he did not think her less so when she was seated on a beautiful little horse, which she rode gracefully and courageously, in a blue riding-habit, and a sweet little grey hat with a plume of companion's feathers hanging down on one side. The cockatoo was on the door-step to see her start, and talked so incessantly in his excitement, that even when the magpie (who wanted, you know, to see the thing quietly and form his opinion, not to have everybody talking at once) assaulted him and pulled a feather out of his tail, he could not be quiet. Sam's horse Widderin capered with delight, and Sam's dog Rover coursed far and wide before them, with joyful bark. So they three went off through the summer's day as happy as though all life were one great summer's holiday, and there were no storms below the horizon to rise and overwhelm them ; through the grassy flat, where the quail whirred before them, and dropped again as if shot ; across the low rolling forest land, where a million parrots fled whistling to and fro, like jewels in the sun ; past the old stock-yard, past the sheep-wash hut, and then through forest which grew each moment more dense and lofty, along the faint and narrow track which led into one of the most abrupt and romantic gullies which pierce the Australian Alps.

All this became classic ground to them afterwards, and the causes which made it so were now gathering to their fulfilment, even now, while these three were making happy holiday together, little dreaming of what was to come. Afterwards, years after, they three came and looked on this valley again ; not as now, with laughter and jokes,

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but silently, speaking in whispers, as though they feared to wake the dead.

The road they followed, suddenly rising from the forest, took over the shoulder of a rocky hill, and then, plunging down again, followed a little running creek, up to where a great ridge of slate, crossing the valley, hemmed them in on either side, leaving only room for the creek and the road. Following it further, the glen opened out, sweeping away right and left in broad curves, while straight before them, a quarter of a mile distant, there rose out of the low scrub and fern a mighty wall of limestone, utterly barring all further progress save in a single spot to the left, where the vast grey wall was split, giving a glimpse of another glen beyond. This great natural cleft was the limestone gate which they had come to see, and which was rendered the more wonderful by a tall pinnacle of rock, which stood in the centre of the gap about 300 feet in height, not unlike one of the same kind in Dovedale.

"I don't think I ever saw anything so beautiful," said Alice. "How fine that spire of rock is, shooting up from the feathered shrubs at the base! I will come here some day and try to draw it."

"Wait a minute," said Jim; "you have not seen half yet."

He led them through the narrow pass, among the great boulders which lined the creek. The instant they came beyond, a wind, icy cold, struck upon their cheeks, and Alice, dropping her reins, uttered a cry of awe and wonder, and Sam too exclaimed aloud; for before them, partly seen through crowded tree stems, and partly towering above the forest, lay a vast level wall of snow, flecked here and there by the purple shadow of some flying summer cloud.

A sight so vast and magnificent held them silent for a little; then suddenly, Jim, looking at Alice, saw that she was shivering.

"What is the matter, Alice, my dear?" he said;

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"let us come away: the snow-wind is too much for you."

"Oh! it is not that!" she said. "Somebody is walking over my grave."

"Oh, that's all!" said Jim; "they are always at it with me, in cold weather. Let 'em. It won't hurt, that I know of."

But they turned homeward, nevertheless; and coming through the rock walls again, Jim said,

"Sam, what was that battle the Doctor and you were reading about one day, and you told me all about it afterwards, you know?"

"Malplaquet?"

"No; something like that, though. Where they got bailed up among the rocks, you know, and fought till they were all killed."

"Thermopylæ?"

"Ah! This must be just such another place, I should think."

"Thermopylæ was by the sea-shore," said Alice.

"Now, I should imagine," said Sam, pointing to the natural glacia formed by the decay of the great wall which they had seen fronting them as they came up, "that a few determined men with rifles, posted among those fern-trees could make a stand against almost any force."

"But, Sam," said Jim, "they might be cut up by cavalry. Horses could travel right up the face of the slope there. Now, suppose a gang of bushrangers in that fern-scrub; do you think an equal number of police could not turn them out of it? Why, I have seen the place where Moppy's gang turned and fought Desborough on the Macquarrie. It was stronger than this, and yet—you know what he did with them, only kept one small one for hanging, as he elegantly expressed it."

"But I ain't talking of bushrangers," said Sam. "I mean such fellows as the Americans in the War of Inde-

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pendence. See what a dance they led our troops with their bushfighting."

"I wonder if ever there will be a War of Independence here," said Alice.

"I know which side I should be on, if there was," said Sam.

"Which would that be?" asked Jim.

"My dear friend," said Sam testily, "how can you, an officer's son, ask me, an officer's son, such a question? The King's (I beg pardon, the Queen's) side, of course."

"And so would I," said Jim, "if it came to that, you know."

"You would never have the honour of speaking to your sweet sister again, if you were not," said Alice.

"But I don't think those Americans were in the wrong; do you, Miss Brentwood?" said Sam.

"Why no; I don't suppose that such a man as General Washington, for instance, would have had much to do with them if they had been."

"However," said Sam, "we are talking of what will never occur here. To begin with, we could never stand alone against a great naval power. They would shut us up here to starve. We have everything to lose, and nothing to gain by a separation. I would hardly like, myself, for the sake of a few extra pounds taxes, to sell my birthright as an Englishman."

"Conceive," said Alice, "being in some great European city, and being asked if you were British, having to say, No!"

They were coming through the lower pass, and turned to look back on the beautiful rock-walled amphitheatre, sleeping peaceful and still under the afternoon sun. The next time (so it happened) that Sam and Jim looked at that scene together, was under very different circumstances. Now the fronds of the fern-trees were scarce moved in the summer's breeze, and all was silent as the grave. They saw it again :—when every fern tuft blazed with musketry,

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and the ancient cliffs echoed with the shouts of fighting, and the screams of dying men and horses.

"It is very early," said Alice. "Let us ride to the left, and see the great waterfall you speak of, Jim."

It was agreed. Instead of going home they turned through the forest, and debouched on the plains about two miles above Garoopna, and, holding their course to the river, came to it at a place where a great trap dike, crossing, formed a waterfall, over which the river, now full with melting snow, fell in magnificent confusion. They stood watching the grand scene with delight for a short time, and then, crossing the river by a broad, shallow ford, held their way homeward, along the eastern and more level bank, sometimes reining up their horses to gaze into the tremendous glen below them, and watch the river crawling on through many impediments, and beginning to show a golden light in its larger pools beneath the sloping, westering sun.

Just as they sighted home, on the opposite side of the river, they perceived two horsemen before them, evidently on the track between Major Buckley's and Garoopna. They pushed on to "overhaul them," and found that it was Doctor Mulhaus, whom they received with boisterous welcome, and a tall, handsome young gentleman, a stranger.

"A young gentleman, Sam," said the Doctor, "Mr. Halbert by name, who arrived during your father's absence with letters of introduction. I begged him to follow your father over here, and, as his own horse was knocked up, I mounted him at his own request on Jezebel, he preferring her to all the horses in the paddock on account of her beauty, after having been duly warned of her wickedness. But Mr. Halbert seems of the Centaur species, and rather to enjoy an extra chance of getting his neck broke."

Politeness to strangers was one of the first articles of faith in the Buckley and Brentwood families: so the young folks were soon on the best of terms.

"Are you from Sydney way, Mr. Halbert?" said Sam.

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"Indeed," said the young man, "I have only landed in the country six weeks. I have got three years' leave of absence from my regiment in India, and, if I can see a chance, I shall cut the army and settle here."

"Oh!" said Alice, "are you a soldier, Mr. Halbert?"

"I have that honour, Miss Brentwood. I am a lieutenant in the Bengal Horse Artillery."

"That is delightful. I am a soldier's daughter, and Mr. Buckley here also, as you know, I suppose."

"A soldier's daughter, is he?" said impudent Jim. "A very fine girl, too!"

Sam, and Jim too, had some disrespectful ideas about soldier's riding qualities; Sam could not help saying,—

"I hope you will be careful with that mare, Mr. Halbert; I should not like a guest of ours to be damaged. She's a desperate brute,—I'm afraid of her myself."

"I think I know the length of her ladyship's foot," said Halbert, laughing good-naturedly.

As they were speaking, they were passing through a narrow way in a wattle scrub. Suddenly a blundering kangaroo, with Rover in full chase, dashed right under the mare's nose and set her plunging furiously. She tried to wheel round, but, finding herself checked, reared up three or four times, and at last seemed to stand on her hind legs, almost overbalancing herself.

Halbert sat like a statue till he saw there was a real chance of her falling back on him; then he slipped his right foot quickly out of the stirrup, and stood with his left toe in the iron, balancing himself till she was quieter; then he once more threw his leg across the saddle, and regained his seat, laughing.

Jim clapped his hands; "By Jove, Sam, we must get some of these army men to teach us to ride, after all!"

"We must do so," said Sam. "If that had been you or I, Jim, with our rough clumsy hands, we should have had the mare back atop of us."

"Indeed," said Alice, "you are a splendid rider, Mr.

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Halbert : but don't suppose, from Mr. Buckley's account of himself, that he can't ride well ; I assure you we are all very proud of him. He can sit some bucking horses which very few men will attempt to mount."

" And that same bucking, Miss Brentwood," said Halbert, " is just what puzzles me utterly. I got on a bucking horse in Sydney the other day, and had an ignominious tumble in the sale-yard, to everybody's great amusement."

" We must give one another lessons, then, Mr. Halbert," said Sam ;—" but I can see already, that you have a much finer hand than I."

Soon after they got home, where the rest of the party were watching for them, wondering at their late absence, Halbert was introduced to the Major by the Doctor, who said, " I deliver over to you a guest, a young conqueror from the Himalayas, and son of an old brother warrior. If he now breaks his neck horse-riding, his death will not be at my door ; I can now eat my dinner in peace."

After dinner the three young ones, Sam, Alice, and Jim, gathered round the fire, leaving Halbert with the Major and the Captain talking military, and the Doctor looking over an abstruse mathematical calculation, with which Captain Brentwood was not altogether satisfied. Alice and Sam sat in chairs side by side, like Christians, but Jim lay on the floor, between the two, like a blackfellow ; they talked in a low voice about the stranger.

" I say," said Jim, " ain't he a handsome chap, and can't he ride ? I dare say he's a devil to fight, too,—hear him tell how they pounded away at those Indians in that battle. I expect they'd have made a general of him before now, only he's too young. Dad says he's a very distinguished young officer. Alice, my dear, you should see the wound he's got, a great seam all down his side. I saw it when he was changing his shirt in my room before dinner."

" Poor fellow !" said Alice ; " I like him very much. Don't you, Mr. Buckley ? "

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"I like him exceedingly;—I hope he'll stop with us," continued Jim.

"And I also," said Sam, "but what shall we do to-morrow?"

"Let's have a hunt," said Jim. "Halbert, have you ever been kangaroo hunting?"

"Never!—I want to go!"

"Well, we can have a capital hunt to-morrow: Sam has got his dog Fly here, and I'll take one of my best dogs, and we'll have a good run, I dare say."

"I shall come, too," said Alice: "that is," added she, looking shyly at Sam, "if you would be kind enough to take care of me, and let Mr. Halbert and Jim do the riding. But I'm afraid I shall be sadly in your way."

"If you don't go," said Sam, "I shall stay at home: now then!"

At this minute, the housekeeper came in bearing jugs and glasses. "Eleanor," said Jim, "is Jerry round?"

"Yes, sir; he's coiled somewhere in the woodhouse," said she.

"Just rouse him out and send him in."

"Who is this Jerry who coils in woodhouses?" said Halbert.

"A tame black belonging to us. He is great at all sorts of hunting; I want to see if he can find us a flying doe for to-morrow."

Jerry entered, and advanced with perfect self-possession towards the fire. He was a tall savage, with a big black beard, and wavy hair like a Cornishman. He was dressed in an old pair of dandy riding breeches of Jim's, which reached a short way below the knees, fitting closely, and a blue check shirt rolled up above the elbow showing his lean wiry forearm, seamed and scarred with spear wounds and bruises. He addressed nobody, but kept his eyes wandering all over the room; at length he said, looking at the ceiling,—

"Cobbon thirsty this fellow: you got a drop of brandy?"

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"Jerry," said Jim, having produced the brandy, "you make a light kangaroo."

"All about plenty kangaroo," said Jerry.

"Yowi; * but mine want it big one flying doe."

"Ah-h-h! Mine make a light flying doe along a stockyard this morning; close by, along a fent, you see!"

"That'll do," says Jim. "We'll be up round the old stockyard after breakfast to-morrow. You, Jerry, come with us."

It was a fresh breezy autumn morning in April, when the four sallied forth, about nine o'clock, for their hunt. The old stockyard stood in the bush, a hundred yards from the corner of the big paddock fence, and among low rolling ranges and gullies, thickly timbered with gum, cherry, and sheoak: a thousand parrots flew swiftly in flocks, whistling and screaming from tree to tree, while wattled-birds and numerous other honey-eaters clustered on the flowering banksias. The spur-winged plover and the curlew ran swiftly among the grass, and on a tall dead tree white cockatoos and blue cranes watched the intruders curiously.

Alice and Sam rode together soberly, and before them were Halbert and Jim, girt up, ready for the chase. Before them, again, was the active blackfellow, holding the dogs in a leash,—two tall hounds, bred of foxhound and greyhound, with a dash of colley.

A mob of kangaroos crosses their path, but they are all small; so the dogs, though struggling fiercely, are still held tight by Jerry: now he crosses a little ridge before them and looks down into the gully beyond, holding up his hand.

The two young men gather up their reins and settle themselves in their seats. "Now, Halbert," says Jim, "sit fast and mind the trees."

They ride up to the blackfellow; through the low

it means yes. But Mr. Hamlyn is a little incorrect in using It is more of a Moreton Bay word.—H. K.

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wattles, they can see what is in the gully before them, though the dogs cannot.

"Baal, flying doe this one," says Jerry in a whisper. "Old man this fellow, cobbon matong,* mine think it."

A great six-foot kangaroo was standing about two hundred yards from them, staring stupidly about him.

"Let go, Jerry," said Jim. The dogs released, sprang forward, and, in an instant, saw their quarry, which, with a loud puff of alarm, bounded away up the opposite slope at full speed, taking twenty feet at each spring.

Halbert and Jim dashed off after the dogs, who had got a good start of them, and were laying themselves out to their work right gallantly; Sam's dog, Fly, slightly leading. Both dogs were close on the game, and Halbert said,—

"We are going to have a short run, I'm afraid."

"Talk about that twenty minutes hence," said Jim, settling to his work.

Over range after range they hold their headlong course. Now a bandicoot scuttles away from under their feet to hide in his hollow log; now a mob of terrified cattle huddle together as they sweep by; now they are flying past a shepherd's hut, and the mother runs out to snatch up a child, and bear him out of harm's way, after they are safe past. A puppy, three weeks old, joins the chase with heart and soul, but "eaves in" at about fifty yards, and sits him down to bark. Now they are rushing on through a broad flat, with another great range before them. Still always the grey bounding figure holds on, through sunlight and shadow, with the dogs grim and steadfast close in his wake.

The work begins to tell on the horses. Fat Jezebel, who could hardly be held at first, now is none the worse for a little spur; and Jim's lean, long-legged horse, seems to consider that the entertainment ought to conclude shortly. "Well done, Fly!" he shouts; "bravely tried,

* "Very strong."

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my girl!" She had drawn herself ahead, and made a bold strike at the kangaroo, but missed him. Now the other dog, Bolt, tries it, but without luck; and now they have both dropped a little back, and seem in for another mile or so.

Well done, lass!—there she goes again! With a furious effort she pushes ahead, and seizes the flying beast by the hock—this time with some luck, for down he goes in a cloud of dust and broken sticks, and both the dogs are on him at once. Now he is up again and running, but feebly. And see, what is the matter with the young dog? He runs on, but keeps turning, snapping fiercely at his side, and his footsteps are marked with blood. Poor lad! he has got a bad wound in that last tumble,—the kangaroo has ripped up his flank with a kick from his hind foot. But now the chase is over,—the hunted beast has turned, and is at bay against a tree, Fly standing before him, waiting for assistance, snarling fiercely.

They pulled up. Jim took out a pistol and presented it to Halbert.

"Thank you," said he. "Hair trigger?"

"Yes."

He balanced it for a second, and in another the kangaroo was lying quivering on the ground, shot through the heart.

"Well done!" said Jim. "Now I must look to this dog."

All his flank along the ribs was laid open, and Jim, producing a needle and thread, proceeded to sew it up.

"Will you let me do that for you?" said Halbert.

"I wish you would. I'm fond of the poor thing, and my hand shakes. You've seen the surgeons at work, I expect."

"Yes, indeed." And he tenderly and carefully stitched up the dog's side, while Jim held him.

"What do we do with the game?" said he.

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"Oh, Jerry will be along on our tracks presently," said Jim. "He brings me the tail, and does what he likes with the rest. I wonder where Sam and Alice are?"

"Oh, they are right enough," said Halbert, laughing. "I dare say they are not very anxious about the kangaroo, or anything else. That's 'a case,' I suppose?"

"Well, I hope it is," said Jim; "but you see I don't know. Girls are so odd."

"Perhaps he has never asked her."

"No; I don't think he has. I wish he would. You are not married, are you?"

"My God—no!" said Halbert, "nor ever shall be."

"Never?"

"Never, Jim. Let me tell you a story as we ride home. You and I shall be good friends, I know. I like you already, though we have only known one another two days. I can see well what you are made of. They say it eases a man's mind to tell his grief. I wish it would mine. Well; before I left England I had secretly engaged myself to marry a beautiful girl, very much like your sister, a governess in my brother-in-law's family. I went off to join my regiment, and left her there with my sister and her husband, Lord Carstone, who treated her as if she was already one of the family—God bless them! Two years ago my father died, and I came into twenty thousand pounds; not much, but enough to get married on in India, particularly as I was getting on in my profession. So I wrote to her to come out to me. She sailed in the Assam, for Calcutta, but the ship never arrived. She was spoken off the Mauritius, but never seen after. The underwriters have paid up her insurance, and everyone knows now that the Assam went down in a typhoon, with all hands."

"God bless you!" said Jim, "I am very sorry for that."

"Thank you. I have come here for change of scene more than anything, but I think I shall go back soon."

"I shall come with you," said Jim. "I have determined to be a soldier, and I know the governor has interest

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enough to get me into some regiment in India." (I don't believe he had ever thought of it before that morning.)

"If you are determined, he might. His services in India were too splendid to have been forgotten yet."

"I wonder," said Jim, "if he will let me go? I'd like to see Alice married first."

They jogged on in silence for a little, and slowly, on account of the wounded dogs. Then Jim said,—

"Well, and how did you like your sport?"

"Very much indeed; but I thought bush-riding was harder work. We have only had one or two leaps over fallen logs altogether."

"There ain't much leaping, that's a fact. I suppose you have been fox-hunting?"

"My father was a master of hounds," replied Halbert. "On the first day of the season, when the hounds met at home, there would be two hundred horsemen on our terrace, fifty of them, at least, in pink. It was a regular holiday for all the country round. Such horses, too. My father's horse, the Elk, was worth £300, and there were better horses than him to be seen in the field, I promise you."

"And all after a poor little fox!"

"You don't know Charley, I can see," said Halbert. "Poor little fox, indeed! Why, it's as fair a match between the best-tryed pack of hounds in England, and an old dog-fox, as one would wish to see. And as hard work as it is to ride up to them, even without a stiff fence at every two hundred yards, to roll you over on your head, if your horse is blown or clumsy. Just consider how many are run, and how few are killed. I consider a fox to be the noblest quarry in the world. His speed, courage, and cunning are wonderful. I have seen a fox run fifteen miles as the crow flies, and only three of us in at the death. That's what I call sport."

"So do I, by Jove!" said Jim. "You have some good sport in India, too?"

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"Yes. Pig-sticking is pretty—very pretty, I may say, if you have two or three of the right sort with you. All the Griffins ought to hunt together, though. There was a young fellow, a King's-officer, and a nobleman, too, came out with us the other day, and rode well forward, but as the pig turned he contrived to spear my horse through the pastern. He was full of apologies, and I was outwardly highly polite and indifferent, but internally cursing him up hill and down dale. I went home and had the horse shot ; but when I got up next morning, there was a Syce leading up and down a magnificent Australian, a far finer beast than the one which I had lost, which my Lord had sent up to replace my unfortunate nag. I went down to his quarters and refused to accept it ; but he forced me in the end, and it gave me a good lesson about keeping my temper over an unavoidable accident, which I don't mean to forget. Don't you think it was prettily done ? "

"Yes, I do," said Jim ; "but you see these noblemen are so rich that they can afford to do that sort of thing, where you or I couldn't. But I expect they are very good fellows on the whole."

"There are just as large a proportion of good noblemen as there are of any other class—more than that you have no right to expect. I'm a liberal, as my father was before me, and a pretty strong one too ; but I think that a man with sixty thousand acres, and a seat in the House of Lords, is entitled to a certain sort of respect. A Grand Seigneur is a very capital institution if he will only stay on his estates some part of the year."

"Ay !" said Jim ; who was a shrewd fellow in his way. "They know that here, well enough ; look at our Macarthurs and Wentworths,—but then they must be men, and not snobs, as the governor says."

When they got home, they found Sam and Alice sitting in the verandah as comfortable as you please.

"Well," said Jim, "you are a nice lot ! This is what you call kangaroo-hunting !"

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"Oh, you went too fast for us. Have you killed?"

"Yes! out by the big swamp."

"You have taken your time to get home then."

"Poor Bolt is cut up, and we couldn't go out of a walk. Now give us something to eat, will you, Alice?"

"Well, ring the bell and we will have lunch."

But just as Jim rang the bell, there was a loud voice outside, and the three young men went out to see who it was, and found two horsemen in front of the door.

One, who was still sitting on his horse, was a dark-haired slight young man, Charles Hawker in fact, whom we know already, but the other, who had dismounted, and was leaning against his horse, was a highbred, delicate little fellow, to whom we have yet to be introduced.

He was a slight lad, perhaps not more than eighteen, with one of the pleasantest, handsomest faces of his own that you could wish to see, and also a very intellectual look about him, which impressed you at once with the idea that if he lived he would have made some sort of figure in life. He was one of the greatest dandies, also, in those parts, and after the longest ride used to look as if he had been turned out of a band-box. On the present occasion he had on two articles of dress which attracted Jim's attention amazingly. The first was a new white hat, which was a sufficiently remarkable thing in those parts at that time; and the second, a pair of yellow leather riding-trousers.

"Why, Cecil Mayford!" said Sam, "how do you do? Charley, how are you? Just in time for lunch. Come in."

Jim was walking round and round Cecil without speaking a word. At last the latter said, "How do *you* do, James Brentwood?"

"How do your breeches do, Cecil?" answered Jim; "that is a much more important question. By the bye, let me introduce you to Mr. Halbert. Also, allow me to have the honour to inform you that my sister Alice is come home from school."

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"I am aware of that, and am come over to pay my respects. Sam, leave me alone. If I were to disarrange my dress before I was presented to Miss Brentwood, I would put a period to my existence. Jim, my dear soul, come in and present me. Don't all you fellows come mobbing in, you know."

So Jim took Cecil in, and the other young fellows lounged about the door in the sun. "Where have you come from, Charley?" asked Sam.

"I have been staying at the Mayfords'; and this morning, hearing that you and your father were here, we thought we would come over and stay a bit."

"By the bye," said Sam, "Ellen Mayford was to have come home from Sydney the same time as Alice Brentwood, or thereabouts. Pray, is she come?"

"Oh, yes!" said Charles; "she is come this fortnight, or more."

"What sort of a girl has she grown to be?"

"Well, *I* call her an uncommonly pretty girl. A very nice girl indeed, I should say. Have you heard the news from the north?"

"No!"

"Bushrangers! Nine or ten devils, loose on the upper Macquarrie, caught the publican at Marryong alone in the bush; he had been an overlooker, or some such thing, in old times, so they stripped him, tied him up, gave him four dozen, and left him to the tender mercies of the blow-flies, in consequence of which he was found dead next day, with the cords at his wrists cutting down to the bone with the struggles he made in his agony."

"Whew!" said Sam. "We are going to have some of the old-fashioned work over again. Let us hope Desborough will get hold of them before they come this way."

"Some of our fellow-countrymen," said Halbert, "are, it seems to me, more detestably ferocious than savages, when they once get loose."

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“Much of a muchness—no better, and perhaps no worse,” said Sam. “All men who act entirely without any law in their actions arrive at much the same degree, whether white or black.”

“And will this Captain Desborough, whom you speak of, have much chance of catching these fellows?” asked Halbert.

“They will most likely disperse on his approach if he takes any force against them,” said Sam. “I heard him say, myself, that the best way was to tempt them to stay and show fight, by taking a small force against them, as our admirals used to do to the French, in the war. By the bye, how is Tom Troubridge? He is quite a stranger to me. I have only seen him twice since he was back from Port Phillip.”

“He is off again now, after some rams, up to the north.”

“I hope he won’t fall in with the bushrangers. Anybody with him?”

“William Lee,” answered Charles.

“A good escort. There is lunch going in,—come along.”

Chapter III

Sam meets with a Rival, and how he treated him

THAT week one of those runs upon the Captain’s hospitality took place which are common enough in the bush, and, although causing a temporary inconvenience, are generally as much enjoyed by the entertainer as entertained. Everybody during this next week came to see them, and nobody went back again. So by the end of the week there were a dozen or fourteen guests assembled, all uninvited, and apparently bent on making a good long stay of it.

Alice, who had expected to be rather put out, conducted everything with such tact and dignity that Mrs. Buckley

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remarked to Mrs. Mayford, when they were alone together, "that she had never seen such beauty and such charming domestic grace combined, and that he would be a lucky young fellow who got her for a wife."

"Well, yes, I should be inclined to say so too," answered Mrs. Mayford. "Rather much of the boarding-school as yet, but that will wear off, I dare say. I don't think the young lady will go very long without an offer. Pray, have you remarked anything, my dear madam?"

Yes, Mrs. Buckley had remarked something on her arrival the day before yesterday. She had remarked Sam and Alice come riding over the paddock, and Sam, by way of giving a riding-lesson, holding the little white hand in his, teaching it (the dog!) to hold the reins properly. And on seeing Alice she had said to herself, "That will do." But all this was not what Mrs. Mayford meant,—in fact, these two good ladies were at cross-purposes.

"Well, I thought I did," replied Mrs. Buckley referring to Sam. "But one must not be premature. They are both very young, and may not know their own minds."

"They seem as if they did," said Mrs. Mayford. "Look there!" Outside the window they saw something which gave Mrs. Buckley a sort of pang, and made Mrs. Mayford laugh.

There was no one in the garden visible but Cecil Mayford and Alice, and she was at that moment busily engaged in pinning a rose into his buttonhole. "The audacious girl!" thought Mrs. Buckley; "I am afraid she will be a daughter of debate among us. I wish she had not come home." While Mrs. Mayford continued,—

"I am far from saying, mind you, my dear Mrs. Buckley, that I don't consider Cecil might do far better for himself. The girl is pretty, very pretty, and will have money. But she is too decided, my dear. Fancy a girl of her age expressing opinions! Why, if I had ventured to express opinions at her age, I—I don't know what my father would have said."

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"Depend very much on what sort of opinions they were ; wouldn't it ?" said Mrs. Buckley.

"No ; I mean any opinions. Girls ought to have no opinions at all. There, last night when the young men were talking all together, she must needs get red in the face and bridle up, and say, ' She thought an Englishman who wasn't proud of Oliver Cromwell was unworthy of the name of an Englishman.' Her very words, I assure you. Why, if my daughter Ellen had dared to express herself in that way about a murderous Papist, I'd have slapped her face."

"I don't think Cromwell was a Papist ; was he ?" said Mrs. Buckley.

"A Dissenter, then, or something of that sort," said Mrs. Mayford. "But that don't alter the matter. What I don't like to see is a young girl thrusting her oar in that way. However, I shall make no opposition, I can assure you. Cecil is old enough to choose for himself, and a mother's place is to submit. Oh, no, I assure you, whatever my opinions may be, I shall offer no opposition."

"I shouldn't think you would," said Mrs. Buckley, as the other left the room : "rather a piece of luck for your boy to marry the handsomest and richest girl in the country. However, madam, if you think I am going to play a game of chess with you for that girl, or any other girl, why, you are mistaken."

And yet it was very provoking. Ever since she had begun to hear from various sources how handsome and clever Alice was, she had made up her mind that Sam should marry her, and now to be put out like this by people whom they had actually introduced into the house ! It would be a great blow to Sam too. She wished he had never seen her. She would sooner have lost a limb than caused his honest heart one single pang. But, after all, it might be only a little flirtation between her and Cecil. Girls would flirt ; but then there would be Mrs. Mayford manœuvring and scheming her heart out, while she, Agnes Buckley,

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was constrained by her principles only to look on and let things take their natural course.

Now, there arose a coolness between Agnes Buckley and the Mayfords, mother and son, which was never made up—never, oh, never! Not very many months after this she would have given ten thousand pounds to have been reconciled to the kind-hearted old busy-body; but then it was too late.

But now, going out into the garden, she found the Doctor busy planting some weeds he had found in the bush, in a quiet corner, with an air of stealth, intending to privately ask the gardener to see after them till he could fetch them away. The magpie, having seen from the window a process of digging and burying going on, had attended in his official capacity, standing behind the Doctor, and encouraging him every now and then with a dance, or a few flute-like notes of music. I need hardly mention that the moment the Doctor's back was turned the bird rooted up every one of the plants, and buried them in some secret spot of his own, where they lie, I believe, till this day.

To the Doctor she told the whole matter, omitting nothing, and then asked his advice. "I suppose," she said, "you will only echo my own determination of doing nothing at all?"

"Quite so, my dear madam. If she loves Sam, she will marry him; if she don't, he is better without her."

"That is true," said Mrs. Buckley. "I hope she will have good taste enough to choose my boy."

"I hope so too, I am sure," said the Doctor. "But we must not be very furious if she don't. Little Cecil Mayford is both handsomer and cleverer than Sam. We must not forget that, you know."

That evening was the first thoroughly unhappy evening, I think, that Sam ever passed in his life. I am inclined to imagine that his digestion was out of order. If any of my readers ever find themselves in the same state of mind

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that he was in that night, let them be comforted by considering that there is always a remedy at hand, before which evil thoughts and evil tempers of all kinds fly like mist before the morning sun. How many serious family quarrels, marriages out of spite, alterations of wills, and secessions to the Church of Rome, might have been prevented by a gentle dose of blue pill! What awful instances of chronic dyspepsia are presented to our view by the immortal bard in the characters of Hamlet and Othello! I look with awe on the digestion of such a man as the present King of Naples. Banish dyspepsia and spiritous liquors from society, and you would have no crime, or at least so little that you would not consider it worth mentioning.

However, to return to Sam. He, Halbert, Charles Hawker, and Jim had been away riding down an emu, and had stayed out all day. But Cecil Mayford, having made excuse to stay at home, had been making himself in many ways agreeable to Alice, and at last had attended her on a ride, and on his return had been rewarded with a rose, as we saw. The first thing Sam caught sight of when he came home was Alice and Cecil walking up and down the garden very comfortably together, talking and laughing. He did not like to see this. He dreaded Cecil's powers of entertainment too much, and it made him angry to hear how he was making Alice laugh. Then, when the four came into the house, this offending couple took no notice of them at all, but continued walking up and down in the garden, till Jim, who, not being in love, didn't care twopence whether his sister came in or not, went out to the verandah, and called out "Hi!"

"What now?" said Alice, turning round.

"Why, we're come home," said Jim, "and I want you."

"Then you won't get me, impudence," said Alice, and began walking up and down again. But not long after, having to come in, she just said, "How do, Mr. Halbert?" and passed on, never speaking to Sam. Now there was

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no reason why she should have spoken to him, but "Good evening, Mr. Buckley," would not have hurt anybody. And now in came Cecil, with that unlucky rose, and Jim immediately began,—

"Hallo, Cis, where did you get your flower?"

"Ah, that's a secret," said Cecil, with an affected look.

"No secret at all," said Alice, coming back. "I gave it to him. He had the civility to stay and take me out for a ride, instead of going to run down those poor pretty emus. And that is his reward. I pinned it into his coat for him." And out she went again.

Sam was very sulky, but he couldn't exactly say with whom. With himself more than anybody, I believe.

"Like Cecil's consummate impudence!" was his first thought; but after he had gone to his room to dress, his better nature came to him, and before dinner came on he was his old self again, unhappy still, but not sulky, and determined to be just.

"What right have I to be angry, even suppose she does come to care more for him than for me? What can be more likely? he is more courtly, amusing, better-looking, they say, and certainly cleverer; oh, decidedly cleverer. He might as well make me his enemy as I make him mine. No; dash it all! He has been like a brother to me ever since he was so high, and I'll be d——d if there shan't be fair play between us two, though I should go into the army through it. But I'll watch, and see how things go."

So he watched at dinner and afterwards, but saw little to comfort him. Saw one thing, nay, two things, most clearly. One was, that Cecil Mayford was madly in love with Alice; and the other was, that poor Cecil was madly jealous of Sam. He treated him differently to what he had ever done before, as though on that evening he had first found his rival. Nay, he became almost rude, so that once Jim looked suddenly up, casting his shrewd blue eyes first on one and then on the other, as though to ask what the matter was. But Sam only said to himself, "Let him

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go on. Let him say what he will. He is beside himself now, and some day he will be sorry. He shall have fair play, come what will."

But it was hard for our lad to keep his temper sometimes. It was hard to see another man sitting alongside of her all the evening, paying her all those nameless little attentions which somehow, however unreasonably, he had brought himself to think were his right, and no one else's, to pay. Hard to wonder and wonder whether or no he had angered her, and if so, how? Halbert, good heart, saw it all, and sitting all the evening by Sam, made himself so agreeable, that for a time even Alice herself was forgotten. But then, when he looked up, and saw Cecil still beside her, and her laughing and talking so pleasantly, while he was miserable and unhappy, the old chill came on his heart again, and he thought—was the last happy week only a deceitful gleam of sunshine, and should he ever take his old place beside her again?

Once or twice more during the evening Cecil was almost insolent to him, but still his resolution was strong.

"If he is a fool, why should I be a fool? I will wait and see if he can win her. If he does, why there is India for me. If he does not, I will try again. Only I will not quarrel with Cecil, because he is blinded. Little Cecil, who used to bathe with me, and ride pickaback round the garden! No; he shall have fair play. By Jove, he shall have fair play, if I die for it."

And he had some little comfort in the evening. When they had all risen to go to bed, and were standing about in confusion lighting candles, he suddenly found Alice by his side, who said in a sweet, low, musical tone,—

"Can you forgive me?"

"What have I to forgive, my dear young lady?" he said softly. "I was thinking of asking your forgiveness for some unknown fault."

"I have behaved so ill to you to-day," she said, "the first of my new friends! I was angry at your going

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out after our poor emus, and I was cross to you when you came home. Do let us be friends again."

There was a chance for a reconciliation! But here was Cecil Mayford thrusting between them with a lit candle just at the wrong moment; and she gave him such a sweet smile, and such kind thanks, that Sam felt nearly as miserable as ever.

And next morning everything went wrong again. Whether it was merely coquetry, or whether she was angry at their hunting the emus, or whether she for a time preferred Cecil's company, I know not; but she, during the next week, neglected Sam altogether, and refused to sit beside him, making a most tiresome show of being unable to get on without Cecil Mayford, who squired her here, there, and everywhere, in the most provoking fashion.

But it so happened that the Doctor and the Major sat up later than the others that night, taking a glass of punch together before the fire, and the Major said, abruptly,—

"There will be mischief among the young fellows about that girl. It is a long while since I saw one man look at another as young Mayford did at our Sam to-night. I wish she were out of the way. Sam and Mayford are both desperately in love with her, and one must go to the wall. I wish that boy of mine was keener; he stayed aloof from her all to-night."

"Don't you see his intention?" said the Doctor. "I am very much mistaken if I do not. He is determined to leave the field clear for all comers, unless she herself makes some sort of advances to him. 'If she prefers Mayford,' says Sam to himself, 'in the way she appears to, why, she is welcome to him, and I can go home as soon as I am assured of it.' And go home he would, too, and never say one word of complaint to any living soul."

"What a clear, brave, honest soul that lad has!" said the Major.

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"Truly," said the Doctor, "I only know one man who is his equal."

"And who is he?"

"His father. Good night : good dreams !"

* * * * *

So Sam kept to his resolution of finding out whether or no Alice was likely to prefer Cecil to him. And, for all his watching and puzzling, he couldn't. He had never confided one word of all this to his mother, and yet she knew it all as well as he.

Meanwhile, Cecil was quite changed. He almost hated Sam, and seldom spoke to him, and at the same time hated himself for it. He grew pale, too, and never could be persuaded to join any sport whatever ; while Sam, being content to receive only a few words in the day from My Lady, worked harder than ever, both in the yards and riding. All day he and Jim would be working like horses, with Halbert for their constant companion, and, half an hour before dinner, would run whooping down to the river for their bathe, and then come in clean, happy, hungry—so full of life and youth, that in these sad days of deficient grinders, indigestion, and liver, I can hardly realize that once I myself was as full of blood and as active and hearty as any of them.

There was much to do the week that Alice and Sam had their little tiff. The Captain was getting in the "scrubbers," cattle which had been left, under the not very careful rule of the Donovans, to run wild in the mountains. These beasts had now to be got in, and put through such processes as cattle are born to undergo. The Captain and the Major were both fully stiff for working in the yards, but their places were well supplied by Sam and Jim. The two fathers, with the assistance of the stockman, and sometimes of the sons, used to get them into the yards, and then the two young men would go to work in a style I have never seen surpassed by any two of the same age. Halbert would sometimes go into

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the yard and assist, or rather hinder ; but he had to give up just when he was beginning to be of some use, as the exertion was too violent for an old wound he had.

Meanwhile Cecil despised all these things, and, though a capital hand among cattle, was now grown completely effeminate, hanging about the house all day, making, in fact, "rather a fool of himself about that girl," as Halbert thought, and thought, besides, "What a confounded fool she will make of herself if she takes that little dandy!—not that he isn't a very gentlemanlike little fellow, but that Sam is worth five hundred of him."

One day, it so happened that every one was out but Cecil and Alice ; and Alice, who had been listening to the noises at the stockyard a long while, suddenly proposed to go there.

"I have never been," she said ; "I should so like to go ! I know I am not allowed, but you need not betray me, and I am sure the others won't. I should so like to see what they are about !"

"I assure you, Miss Brentwood, that it is not a fit place for a lady."

"Why not ?"

Cecil blushed scarlet. If women only knew what awkward questions they ask sometimes ! In this instance he made an ass of himself, for he hesitated and stammered.

"Come along !" said she ; "you are going to say that it is dangerous—(nothing was further from his thoughts) ; I must learn to face a little danger, you know. Come along."

"I am afraid," said Cecil, "that Jim will be very angry with me ;" which was undoubtedly very likely.

"Never mind Jim," she said ; "come along."

So they went, and in the rush and confusion of the beasts' feet got to the yard unnoticed. Sam and Jim were inside, and Halbert was perched upon the rails ; she came close behind him and peeped through.

She was frightened. Close before her was Sam, hatless,

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in shirt and breeches only, almost unrecognisable, grimed with sweat, dust, and filth beyond description. He had been nearly horned that morning, and his shirt was torn from his armpit downwards, showing rather more of a lean muscular flank than would have been desirable in a drawing-room. He stood there with his legs wide apart, and a stick about eight feet long and as thick as one's wrist in his hand ; while before him, crowded into a corner of the yard, were a mob of infuriated, terrified cattle. As she watched, one tried to push past him and get out of the yard ; he stepped aside and let it go. The next instant a lordly young bull tried the same game, but he was " wanted ; " so, just as he came nearly abreast of Sam, he received a frightful blow on the nose from the stick, which turned him.

But only for a moment. The maddened beast shaking his head with a roar rushed upon Sam like a thunderbolt, driving him towards the side of the yard. He stepped on one side rapidly, and then tumbled himself bodily through the rails, and fell with his fine brown curls in the dust, right at the feet of poor Alice, who would have screamed, but could not find the voice.

Jim and Halbert roared with laughter, and Sam, picking himself up, was beginning to join as loud as anybody, when he saw Alice, looking very white and pale, and went towards her.

" I hope you haven't been frightened by that evil-disposed bull, Miss Brentwood," he said pleasantly ; " you must get used to that sort of work."

" Hallo, sister ! " shouted Jim ; " what the deuce brings you here ? I thought you were at home at your worsted work. You should have seen what we were at, Cecil, before you brought her up. Now, miss, just mount that rail alongside of Halbert, and keep quiet."

" Oh, do let me go home, Jim dear ; I am so frightened ! "

" Then you must learn not to be frightened," he said. " Jump up now ! "

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But meanwhile the bull had the best of it, and had got out of the yard. A long lithe lad, stationed outside on horseback, was in full chase, and Jim, leaping on one of the horses tied to the rails, started off to his assistance. The two chased the unhappy bull as a pair of greyhounds chase a hare, with their whips cracking as rapidly and as loudly as you would fire a revolver. After an excursion of about a mile into the forest, the beast was turned and brought towards the yard. Twice he turned and charged the lad, with the same success. The cunning old stock-horse wheeled round or sprang aside, and the bull went blundering into empty space with two fourteen-foot stock-whips playing on his unlucky hide like rain. At length he was brought in again, and one by one those entitled to freedom were passed out by Sam, and others reserved unto a day of wrath—all but one cow with her calf.

All this time Alice had sat by Halbert. Cecil had given no assistance, for Jim would have done anything rather than press a guest into the service. Halbert asked her, what she thought of the sport?

"Oh, it is horrible," she said. "I should like to go home. I hope it is all over."

"Nearly," said Halbert; "that cow and calf have got to go out. Don't get frightened now; watch your brother and Buckley."

It was a sight worth watching; Sam and Jim advanced towards the maddened beasts to try and get the cow to bolt. The cattle were huddled up at the other end of the yard, and having been so long in hand, were getting dangerous. Once or twice young beasts had tried to pass, but had been driven back by the young men, with a courage and dexterity which the boldest matador in Spain could not have surpassed. Cecil Mayford saw, with his well-accustomed eye, that matters were getting perilous, and placed himself at the rails, holding one ready to slip if the beasts should break. In a moment, how or why none could tell, they made a sudden rush: Jim was borne back,

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dealing blows about him like a Paladin, and Sam was down, rolled over and over in the dust, just at Alice's feet.

Half-a-dozen passed right over him as he lay. Jim had made good his retreat from the yard, and Cecil had quietly done just the right thing: put up the rail he held, and saved the day's work. The cattle were still safe, but Sam lay there in the dust, motionless.

Before any of them had appreciated what had happened, Alice was down, and, seizing Sam by the shoulders, had dragged him to the fence. Halbert, horrified to see her actually in the presence of the cattle, leaped after her, put Sam through the rails, and lifted her up to her old post on the top. In another instant the beasts swept furiously round the yard, just over the place where they had been standing.

They gathered round Sam, and for an instant thought he was dead; but just as Jim hurriedly knelt down, and raising his head began to untie his handkerchief, Sam uprose, and, shaking himself and dusting his clothes, said,—

“If it had been any other beast which knocked me down but that poley heifer, I should have been hurt;” and then said that “it was bathing-time, and they must look sharp to be in time for dinner:” three undeniable facts, showing that, although he was a little unsteady on his legs, his intellect had in nowise suffered.

And Halbert, glancing at Alice, saw something in her face that made him laugh; and dressing for dinner in Jim's room, he said to that young gentleman,—

“Unless there are family reasons against it, Jim, which of course I can't speak about, you know, I should say you would have Sam for your brother-in-law in a very short time.”

“Do you really think so, now?” said Jim; “I rather fancied she had taken up with Cecil. I like Sam's fist, mind you, better than Cecil's whole body, though he is a good little fellow, too.”

“She has been doing that, I think, rather to put Sam on

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his mettle ; for I think he was taking things too easy with her at first ; but now, if Cecil has any false hopes, he may give them up ; the sooner the better. No woman who was fancy free could stand seeing that noble head of Sam's come rolling down in the dust at her feet ; and what courage and skill he exhibited, too ! Talk of bull-fights ! I have seen one. Bah ! it is like this nail-brush to a gold watch, to what I saw to-day. Sam, sir, has won a wife by cattle-drafting."

"If that is the case," said Jim, pensively brushing his hair, "I am very glad that Cecil's care for his fine clothes prevented his coming into the yard ; for he is one of the bravest, coolest hands among cattle, I know ; he beats me."

"Then he beats a precious good fellow, Jim. A man who could make such play as you did to-day, with a stick, ought to have nothing but a big three-foot of blue steel in his hand, and her Majesty's commission to use it against her enemies."

"That will come," said Jim, "the day after Sam has got the right to look after Alice ; not before ; the governor is too fond of his logarithms."

When Sam came to dress for dinner he found that he was bruised all over, and had to go to the Captain for "shin plaster," as he called it.

Captain Brentwood had lately been trying homœopathy, which in his case, there being nothing the matter with him, was a decided success. He doctored Sam with Arnica externally, and gave him the five-hundredth of a grain of something to swallow ; but what made Sam forget his bruises quicker than these dangerous and violent remedies, was the delightful change in Alice's behaviour. She was so agreeable that evening, that he was in the seventh heaven ; the only drawback to his happiness being poor Cecil Mayford's utter distraction and misery.~ Next morning, too, after a swim in the river, he handled such a singularly good knife and fork, that Halbert told Jim privately, that if

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he, Sam, continued to sport such a confoundedly good appetite, he would have to be carried half-a-mile on a heifer's horns and left for dead, to keep up the romantic effect of his tumble the day before.

They were sitting at breakfast, when the door opened, and there appeared before the assembled company the lithe lad I spoke of yesterday, who said,—

“ Beg your pardon, sir ; child lost, sir.”

They all started up. “ Whose child ? ” asked the Captain.

“ James Grewer's child, sir, at the wattle hut.”

“ Oh ! ” said Alice, turning to Sam, “ it is that pretty little boy up the river that we were admiring so last week.”

“ When was he lost ? ” asked Major Buckley.

“ Two days now, sir,” said the lad.

“ But the hut is on the plain side of the river,” said the Major ; “ he can't be lost on the plains.”

“ The river is very low, sir,” said the lad ; “ hardly ankle-deep just there. He may have crossed.”

“ The blackfellows may have found him,” suggested Mrs. Buckley.

“ They would have been here before now to tell us, if they had, I am afraid,” said Captain Brentwood. “ Let us hope they may have got him ; however, we had better start at once. Two of us may search the river between this and the hut, and two may follow it towards the Mayfords'. Sam, you have the best horse ; go down to the hut, and see if you can find any trace across the river, on this side, and follow it up to the ranges. Take some one with you, and, by-the-bye, take your dog Rover.”

They were all quickly on the alert. Sam was going to ask Jim to come with him ; but as he was putting the saddle on Widderin he felt a hand on his arm, and, turning, saw Cecil Mayford.

“ Sam Buckley,” said Cecil, “ let me ride with you ; will you ? ”

“ Who sooner, old friend ? ” answered Sam heartily :

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"let us come together by all means, and if we are to go to the ranges, we had better take a blanket a-piece, and a wedge of damper. So if you will get them from the house, I will saddle your horse."

Chapter IV

How the Child was lost, and how he got found again.—What Cecil said to Sam when they found him.—And how in casting Lots, although Cecil won the Lot, he lost the Prize

FOUR or five miles up the river from Garoopna stood a solitary hut, snug—sheltered by a lofty bare knoll, round which the great river chafed among the boulders. Across the stream was the forest sloping down in pleasant glades from the mountain; and behind the hut rose the plain four or five hundred feet over head, seeming to be held aloft by the blue-stone columns which rose from the river side.

In this cottage resided a shepherd, his wife, and one little boy, their son, about eight years old. A strange, wild little bush child, able to speak articulately, but utterly without knowledge or experience of human creatures, save of his father and mother; unable to read a line; without religion of any sort or kind; as entire a little savage, in fact, as you could find in the worst den in your city, morally speaking, and yet beautiful to look on; as active as a roe, and, with regard to natural objects, as fearless as a lion.

As yet unfit to begin labour. All the long summer he would wander about the river bank, up and down the beautiful rock-walled paradise where he was confined, sometimes looking eagerly across the water at the waving forest boughs, and fancying he could see other children far up the vistas beckoning to him to cross and play in that merry land of shifting lights and shadows.

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It grew quite into a passion with the poor little man to get across and play there; and one day when his mother was shifting the hurdles, and he was handing her the strips of green hide which bound them together, he said to her,—

“Mother, what country is that across the river?”

“The forest, child.”

“There’s plenty of quantongs over there, eh, mother, and raspberries? Why mayn’t I get across and play there?”

“The river is too deep, child, and the Bunyip lives in the water under the stones.”

“Who are the children that play across there?”

“Black children, likely.”

“No white children?”

“Pixies; don’t go near ’em, child; they’ll lure you on, Lord knows where. Don’t get trying to cross the river, now, or you’ll be drowned.”

But next day the passion was stronger on him than ever. Quite early on the glorious cloudless midsummer day he was down by the river side, sitting on a rock, with his shoes and stockings off, paddling his feet in the clear tepid water, and watching the million fish in the shallows—black fish and grayling—leaping and flashing in the sun.

There is no pleasure that I have ever experienced like a child’s midsummer holiday. The time, I mean, when two or three of us used to go away up the brook, and take our dinners with us, and come home at night tired, dirty, happy, scratched beyond recognition, with a great nosegay, three little trout, and one shoe, the other one having been used for a boat till it had gone down with all hands out of soundings. How poor our Derby days, our Greenwich dinners, our evening parties, where there are plenty of nice girls, are after that! Depend on it, a man never experiences such pleasure or grief after fourteen as he does before: unless in some cases in his first love-making, when the sensation is new to him.

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But, meanwhile, there sat our child, barelegged, watching the forbidden ground beyond the river. A fresh breeze was moving the trees, and making the whole a dazzling mass of shifting light and shadow. He sat so still that a glorious violet and red king-fisher perched quite close, and, dashing into the water, came forth with a fish, and fled like a ray of light along the winding of the river. A colony of little shell parrots, too, crowded on a bough, and twittered and ran to and fro quite busily, as though they said to him, "We don't mind you, my dear; you are quite one of us."

Never was the river so low. He stepped in; it scarcely reached his ankle. Now surely he might get across. He stripped himself, and, carrying his clothes, waded through, the water never reaching his middle all across the long, yellow, gravelly shallow. And there he stood naked and free in the forbidden ground.

He quickly dressed himself, and began examining his new kingdom, rich beyond his utmost hopes. Such quantongs, such raspberries, surpassing imagination; and when tired of them, such fern boughs, six or eight feet long! He would penetrate this region, and see how far it extended.

What tales he would have for his father to-night. He would bring him here, and show him all the wonders, and perhaps he would build a new hut over here, and come and live in it? Perhaps the pretty young lady, with the feathers in her hat, lived somewhere here, too?

There! There is one of those children he has seen before across the river. Ah! ah! it is not a child at all, but a pretty grey beast, with big ears. A kangaroo, my lad; he won't play with you, but skips away slowly, and leaves you alone.

There is something like the gleam of water on that rock. A snake! Now a sounding rush through the wood, and a passing shadow. An eagle! He brushes so close to the child, that he strikes at the bird with a stick, and then watches him as he shoots up like a rocket, and, measuring

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the fields of air in ever-widening circles, hangs like a motionless speck upon the sky ; though, measure his wings across, and you will find he is nearer fifteen feet than fourteen.

Here is a prize, though ! A wee little native bear, barely eight inches long,—a little grey beast, comical beyond expression, with broad flapped ears, sits on a tree within reach. He makes no resistance, but cuddles into the child's bosom, and eats a leaf as they go along ; while his mother sits aloft, and grunts indignant at the abstraction of her offspring, but, on the whole, takes it pretty comfortably, and goes on with her dinner of peppermint leaves.

What a short day it has been ! Here is the sun getting low, and the magpies and jackasses beginning to tune up before roosting.

He would turn and go back to the river. Alas ! which way ?

He was lost in the bush. He turned back and went, as he thought, the way he had come, but soon arrived at a tall, precipitous cliff, which, by some infernal magic, seemed to have got between him and the river. Then he broke down, and that strange madness came on him which comes even on strong men when lost in the forest : a despair, a confusion of intellect, which has cost many a man his life. Think what it must be with a child !

He was fully persuaded that the cliff was between him and home, and that he must climb it. Alas ! every step he took aloft carried him further from the river and the hope of safety ; and when he came to the top, just at dark, he saw nothing but cliff after cliff, range after range, all around him. He had been wandering through steep gullies all day unconsciously, and had penetrated far into the mountains. Night was coming down, still and crystal-clear, and the poor little lad was far away from help or hope, going his last long journey alone.

Partly perhaps walking, and partly sitting down and weeping, he got through the night ; and when the solemn

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morning came up again he was still tottering along the leading range, bewildered ; crying, from time to time, " Mother, mother ! " still nursing his little bear, his only companion, to his bosom, and holding still in his hand a few poor flowers he had gathered the day before. Up and on all day, and at evening, passing out of the great zone of timber, he came on the bald, thunder-smitten summit ridge, where one ruined tree held up its skeleton arms against the sunset, and the wind came keen and frosty. So, with failing, feeble legs, upward still, towards the region of the granite and the snow ; towards the eyrie of the kite and the eagle.

* * * * * *

Brisk as they all were at Garoopna, none were so brisk as Cecil and Sam. Charles Hawker wanted to come with them, but Sam asked him to go with Jim ; and, long before the others were ready, our two had strapped their blankets to their saddles, and, followed by Sam's dog Rover, now getting a little grey about the nose, cantered off up the river.

Neither spoke at first. They knew what a solemn task they had before them ; and, while acting as though everything depended on speed, guessed well that their search was only for a little corpse, which, if they had luck, they would find stiff and cold under some tree or crag.

Cecil began : " Sam, depend on it that child has crossed the river to this side. If he had been on the plains he would have been seen from a distance in a few hours."

" I quite agree," said Sam. " Let us go down this side till we are opposite the hut, and search for marks by the river side."

So they agreed ; and in half an hour were opposite the hut, and, riding across to it to ask a few questions, found the poor mother sitting on the door-step, with her apron over her head, rocking herself to and fro.

" We have come to help you, mistress," said Sam. " How do you think he is gone ? "

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She said, with frequent bursts of grief, that "some days before he had mentioned having seen white children across the water, who beckoned him to cross and play; that she, knowing well that they were fairies, or perhaps worse, had warned him solemnly not to mind them; but that she had very little doubt that they had helped him over and carried him away to the forest; and that her husband would not believe in his having crossed the river."

"Why, it is not knee-deep across the shallow," said Cecil.

"Let us cross again," said Sam: "he *may* be drowned, but I don't think it."

In a quarter of an hour from starting they found, slightly up the stream, one of the child's socks, which in his hurry to dress he had forgotten. Here brave Rover took up the trail like a bloodhound, and before evening stopped at the foot of a lofty cliff.

"Can he have gone up here?" said Sam, as they were brought up by the rock.

"Most likely," said Cecil. "Lost children always climb from height to height. I have heard it often remarked by old bush hands. Why they do so, God, who leads them, only knows; but the fact is beyond denial.* Ask Rover what he thinks?"

The brave old dog was half-way up, looking back for them. It took them nearly till dark to get their horses up; and, as there was no moon, and the way was getting perilous, they determined to camp, and start again in the morning.

They spread their blankets and lay down side by side. Sam had thought, from Cecil's proposing to come with him in preference to the others, that he would speak of a

* The Author of this book knew a child who, being lost by his father out shooting on one of the flats bordering the Eastern Pyrenees, in Port Phillip, on a Sunday afternoon, was found on the Wednesday following, dead, at an elevation above the Avoca township of between two and three thousand feet.

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subject nearly concerning them both; but Cecil went off to sleep and made no sign; and Sam, ere he dozed, said to himself, "By Jove, if he don't speak this journey, I will. It is unbearable that we should not come to some understanding. Poor Cecil!"

At early dawn they caught up their horses, which had been hobbled with the stirrup leathers, and started afresh. Both were more silent than ever, and the dog, with his nose to the ground, led them slowly along the rocky rib of the mountain, ever going higher and higher.

"It is inconceivable," said Sam, "that the poor child can have come up here. There is Tuckerimbid close to our right, five thousand feet above the river. Don't you think we must be mistaken?"

"The dog disagrees with you," said Cecil. "He has something before him not very far off. Watch him."

The trees had become dwarfed and scattered; they were getting out of the region of trees; the real forest zone was now below them, and they saw they were emerging towards a bald elevated down, and that a few hundred yards before them was a dead tree, on the highest branch of which sat an eagle.

"The dog has stopped," said Cecil; "the end is near."

"See," said Sam, "there is a handkerchief under the tree."

"That is the boy himself," said Cecil.

They were up to him and off in a moment. There he lay, dead and stiff, one hand still grasping the flowers he had gathered on his last happy play-day, and the other laid as a pillow, between the soft cold cheek and the rough cold stone. His midsummer holiday was over, his long journey was ended. He had found out at last what lay beyond the shining river he had watched so long.

Both the young men knelt beside him for a moment in silence. They had found only what they had expected to find, and yet, now that they had found it, they were far more touched and softened than they could have thought

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possible. They stayed in silence a few moments, and then Cecil, lifting up his head, said suddenly,—

“Sam Buckley! there can be no debate between us two, with this lying here between us. Let us speak now.”

“There has never been any debate, Cecil,” said he, “and there never would be, though this little corpse was buried fathoms deep. It takes two to make a quarrel, Cecil, and I will not be one.”

“Sam,” said Cecil, “I love Alice Brentwood better than all the world besides.”

“I know it.”

“And you love her too, as well, were it possible, as I do.”

“I know that too.”

“Why,” resumed Cecil hurriedly, “has this come to pass? Why has it been my unlucky destiny, that the man I love and honour above all others should become my rival? Are there no other women in the world? Tell me, Sam, why is it forced on me to choose between my best friend and the woman I love dearer than life? Why has this terrible emergency come between us?”

“I will tell you why,” said Sam, speaking very quietly, as though fearing to awaken the dead: “to teach us to behave like men of honour and gentlemen, though our hearts break. That is why, Cecil.”

“What shall we do?” said Cecil.

“Easily answered,” said Sam. “Let her decide for herself. It may be, mind you, that she will have neither of us. There has been one living in the house with her lately, far superior in every point to you or I. How if she thought fit to prefer him?”

“Halbert!”

“Yes, Halbert! What more likely? Let you and I find out the truth, Cecil, like men, and abide by it. Let each one ask her in his turn what chance he has.”

“Who first?”

“See here,” said Sam; “draw one of these pieces of

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grass out of my hand. If you draw the longest piece ask her at once. Will you abide by this?"

He said "Yes," and drew—the longest piece.

"That is well," said Sam. "And now no more of this at present. I will sling this poor little fellow in my blanket and carry him home to his mother. See, Cecil, what is Rover at?"

Rover was on his hind legs against the tree, smelling at something. When they came to look, there was a wee little grey bear perched in the hollow of the tree.

"What a very strange place for a young bear!" said Cecil.

"Depend on it," said Sam, "that the child had caught it from its dam, and brought it up here. Take it home with you, Cecil, and give it to Alice."

Cecil took the little thing home, and in time it grew to be between three and four feet high, a grandfather of bears. The magpie protested against his introduction to the establishment, and used to pluck billfulls of hair from his stomach under pretence of lining a nest, which was never made. But in spite of this, the good gentle beast lived nigh as long as the magpie—long enough to be caressed by the waxen fingers of little children, who would afterwards gather round their father, and hear how the bear had been carried to the mountains in the bosom of the little boy who lost his way on the granite ranges, and went to heaven, in the year that the bushrangers came down.

Sam carried the little corpse back in his blanket, and that evening helped the father to bury it by the river side. Under some fern trees they buried him, on a knoll which looked across the river, into the treacherous beautiful forest which had lured him to his destruction.

Alice was very sad for a day or two, and thought and talked much about this sad accident, but soon she recovered her spirits again. And it fell out that a bare week after this, the party being all out in one direction or

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another, Cecil saw Alice alone in the garden, tending her flowers, and knew that the time was come for him to keep his bargain with Sam and speak to her. He felt like a man who was being led to execution ; but screwed his courage to the highest point, and went down to where she was tying up a rose-tree.

“ Miss Brentwood,” he said, “ I am come to petition for a flower.”

“ You shall have a dozen, if you will,” she answered. “ Help yourself ; will you have a peony or a sun-flower ? If you have not made up your mind, let me recommend a good large yellow sun-flower.”

Here was a pretty beginning !

“ Miss Brentwood, don't laugh at me, but listen to me a moment. I love you above all earthly things besides. I worship the ground you walk on. I loved you from the first moment I saw you. I shall love you as well, ay, better, if that could be, on the day my heart is still, and my hand is cold for ever : can you tell me to hope ? Don't drive me, by one hasty half-considered word, to despair and misery for the rest of my life. Say only one syllable of encouragement, and I will bide your time for years and years.”

Alice was shocked and stunned. She saw he was in earnest by his looks, and by his hurried, confused way of speaking. She feared she might have been to blame, and have encouraged him, in her thoughtlessness, more than she ought. “ I will make him angry with me,” she said to herself. “ I will treat him to ridicule. It is the only chance, poor fellow ! ”

“ Mr. Mayford.” she said, “ if I thought you were in jest, I should feel it necessary to tell my father and brother that you had been impertinent. I can only believe that you are in earnest, and I deeply regret that your personal vanity should have urged you to take such an unwarrantable liberty with a girl you have not yet known for ten days.”

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He turned and left her without a word, and she remained standing where she was, half inclined to cry, and wondering if she had acted right on the spur of the moment—sometimes half inclined to believe that she had been unladylike and rude. When a thing of this kind takes place, both parties generally put themselves in immediate correspondence with a confidant. Miss Smith totters into the apartments of her dearest friend, and falls weeping on the sofa, while Jones rushes madly into Brown's rooms in the Temple, and shying his best hat into the coalscuttle, announces that there is nothing now left for him but to drown the past in debauchery. Whereupon Brown, if he is a good fellow, as all the Browns are, produces the whisky and hears all about it.

So in the present instance two people were informed of what had taken place before they went to bed that night; and those two were Jim and Doctor Mulhaus. Alice had stood where Cecil had left her, thinking, could she confide it to Mrs. Buckley, and ask for advice? But Mrs. Buckley had been a little cross to her that week for some reason, and so she was afraid: and, not knowing anybody else well enough, began to cry.

There was a noise of horses' feet just beyond the fence, and a voice calling to her to come. It was Jim, and, drying her eyes, she went out, and he, dismounting, put his arm round her waist and kissed her.

"Why, my beauty," he said, "who has been making you cry?"

She put her head on his shoulder and began sobbing louder than ever. "Cecil Mayford," she said in a whisper.

"Well, and what the d——l has he been at?" said Jim, in a rather startling tone.

"Wants to marry me," she answered, in a whisper, and hid her face in his coat.

"The deuce doubt he does," said Jim; "who does not? What did you tell him?"

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"I told him that I wondered at his audacity."

"Sent him off with a flea in his ear, in fact," said Jim. "Well, quite right. I suppose you would do the same for any man?"

"Certainly I should," she said, looking up.

"If Dr. Mulhaus, now,—eh?"

"I'd box his ears, Jim," she said, laughing: "I would, indeed."

"Or Sam Buckley; would you box his ears, if he were to—you know?"

"Yes," she said. But there spread over her face a sudden crimson blush, like the rosy arch which heralds the tropical sun,* which made Jim laugh aloud.

"If you dared to say a word, Jim," she said, "I would never, never——"

Poor Cecil had taken his horse and had meant to ride home, but came back again at night, "just," he thought, "to have one more look at her; before he entered on some line of life which would take him far away from Garoopna and its temptations."

The Doctor (who has been rather thrust aside lately in the midst of all this love-making and so on) saw that something had gone very wrong with Cecil, who was a great friend of his, and, as he could never bear to see a man in distress without helping him, he encouraged Cecil to stroll down the garden with him, and then kindly and gently asked him what was wrong.

Cecil told him all, from beginning to end, and added that life was over for him, as far as all pleasure and excitement went; and, in short, said what we have all said, or had said to us, in our time, after a great disappointment in love; which the Doctor took for exactly what it was worth, although poor little Cecil's distress was very keen; and, remembering some old bygone day when he had

* A horrible plagiarism, Mr. Hamlyn—

"Your ripe lips moved not, but your cheek
Flushed like the coming of the day." — H. K.

suffered so himself, he cast about to find some comfort for him.

"You will get over this, my boy," said he, "if you would only believe it."

"Never, never!" said Cecil.

"Let me tell you a story as we walk up and down. If it does not comfort you, it will amuse you. How sweet the orange bloom smells! Listen:—Had not the war broke out so suddenly, I should have been married, two months to a day, before the battle of Saarbrück. Catherine was a distant cousin, beautiful and talented, about ten years my junior. Before Heaven, sir, on the word of a gentleman, I never persecuted her with my addresses, and if either of them say I did, tell them from me, sir, that they lie, and I will prove it on their bodies. Bah! I was forgetting. I, as head of the family, was her guardian, and, although my younger brother was nearer her age, I courted her, in all honour and humility proposed to her, and was accepted with even more willingness than most women condescend to show on such occasions, and received the hearty congratulations of my brother. Few women were ever loved better than I loved Catherine. Conceive, Cecil, that I loved her as well as you love Miss Brentwood, and listen to what follows.

"The war-cloud burst so suddenly that, leaving my bride that was to be, to the care of my brother, and putting him in charge over my property, I hurried off to join the Landsturm, two regiments of which I had put into a state of efficiency by my sole exertions.

"You know partly what followed,—in one day an army of 150,000 men destroyed, the King in flight to Königsberg, and Prussia a province of France.

"I fled, wounded badly, desperate and penniless, from that field. I learnt from the peasants, that what I had thought to be merely a serious defeat was an irretrievable disaster; and, in spite of wounds, hunger, and want of clothes, I held on my way towards home.

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“The enemy were in possession of the country, so I had to travel by night alone, and beg from such poor cottages as I dared to approach. Sometimes I got a night’s rest, but generally lay abroad in the fields. But at length, after every sort of danger and hardship, I stood above the broad, sweeping Maine, and saw the towers of my own beloved castle across the river, perched as of old above the vineyards, looking protectingly down upon the little town which was clustered on the river bank below, and which owned me for its master.

“I crossed at dusk. I had to act with great caution, for I did not know whether the French were there or no. I did not make myself known to the peasant who ferried me over, further than as one from the war, which my appearance was sufficient to prove. I landed just below a long high wall which separated the town from the river, and, ere I had time to decide what I should do first, a figure coming out of an archway caught me by the hand, and I recognised my own major-domo, my foster-brother.

“‘I knew you would come back to me,’ he said, ‘if it was only as a pale ghost: though I never believed you dead, and have watched here for you night and day to stop you.’

“‘Are the French in my castle, then?’

“‘There are worse than the French there,’ he said; ‘worse than the devil Bonaparte himself. Treason, treachery, adultery!’

“‘Who has proved false?’ I cried.

“‘Your brother! False to his king, to his word, to yourself. He was in correspondence with the French for six months past, and, now that he believes you dead, he is living in sin with her who was to have been your wife.’

“I did not cry out or faint, or anything of that sort. I only said, ‘I am going to the castle, Fritz,’ and he came with me. My brother had turned him out of the house when he usurped my property, but by a still faithful domestic we were admitted, and I, knowing every secret pas-

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sage in my house, came shoeless from behind some arras, and stood before them as they sat at supper. I was a ghastly sight. I had not shaved for a fortnight, and my uniform hung in tatters from my body; round my head was the same bloody white handkerchief with which I had bound up my head at Jena. I was deadly pale from hunger, too; and from my entering so silently they believed they had seen a ghost. My brother rose, and stood pale and horrified, and Catherine fell fainting on the floor. This was all my revenge, and ere my brother could speak, I was gone—away to England, where I had money in the funds, accompanied by my faithful Fritz, whom Mary Hawker's father buried in Drumston churchyard.

“So in one day I lost a brother, a mistress, a castle, a king, and a fatherland. I was a ruined, desperate man. And yet I lived to see old Blücher with his dirty boots on the silken sofas at the Tuileries, and to become as stout and merry a middle-aged man as any Prussian subject in her young Majesty's dominions.”

Chapter V

How Tom Troubridge kept Watch for the first Time

HUMAN affairs are subject to such an infinite variety of changes and complications, that any attempt to lay down particular rules for individual action, under peculiar circumstances, must prove a failure. Hence I consider proverbs, generally speaking, to be a failure, only used by weak-minded men, who have no opinion of their own. Thus, if you have a chance of selling your station at fifteen shillings, and buying in, close to a new gold-field on the same terms, where fat sheep are going to the butcher at from eighteen shillings to a pound, butter, eggs, and garden produce at famine prices, some dolt unsettles you, and renders you uncertain and miserable by saying that

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“rolling stone gathers no moss;” as if you wanted moss! Again, having worked harder than the Colonial Secretary all the week, and wishing to lie in bed till eleven o’clock on Sunday, a man comes into your room at half-past seven, on a hot morning, when your only chance is to sleep out an hour or so of the heat, and informs you that the “early bird gets the worms.” I had a partner, who bought in after Jim Stockbridge was killed, who was always flying this early bird, when he couldn’t sleep for mosquitoes. I have got rid of him now; but for the two years he was with me, the dearest wish of my heart was that my tame magpie Joshua could have had a quiet two minutes with that early bird before any one was up to separate them. I rather fancy he would have been spoken of as “the late early bird” after that. In short, I consider proverbs as the refuge of weak minds.

The infinite sagacity of the above remarks cannot be questioned; their application may. I will proceed to give it. I have written down the above tirade, nearly, as far as I can guess, a printed pageful (may be a little more, looking at it again), in order to call down the wrath of all wise men, if any such have done me the honour of getting so far in these volumes, on the most trashy and false proverb of the whole: “Coming events cast their shadows before.”

Now, they don’t, you know. They never did, and never will. I myself used to be a strong believer in pre-(what’s the word?—prevarications, predestinations)—no—presentiments; until I found by experience that, although I was always having presentiments, nothing ever came of them. Sometimes somebody would walk over my grave, and give me a creeping in the back, which, as far as I can find out, proceeded from not having my braces properly buttoned behind. Sometimes I have heard the death-watch, produced by a small spider (may the deuce confound him!), not to mention many other presentiments and depressions of spirit, which I am now firmly per-

suaded proceed from indigestion. I am far from denying the possibility of a coincidence in point of time between a fit of indigestion and a domestic misfortune. I am far from denying the possibility of more remarkable coincidences than that. I have read in books, novels by the very best French authors, how a man, not heard of for twenty years, having, in point of fact, been absent during that time in the interior of Africa, may appear at Paris at a given moment, only in time to save a young lady from dishonour, and rescue a property of ten million francs. But these great writers of fiction don't give us any warning whatever. The door is thrown heavily open, and he stalks up to the table where the will is lying, quite unexpectedly; stalks up always, or else strides. (How would it be, my dear Monsieur Dumas, if, in your next novel, he were to walk in, or run in, or hop in, or, say, come in on all-fours like a dog?—anything for a change, you know.) And these masters of fiction are right—"Coming events do not cast their shadows before."

If they did, how could it happen that Mary Hawker sat there in her verandah at Toonarbin singing so pleasantly over her work? And why did her handsome, kindly face light up with such a radiant smile when she saw her son Charles come riding along under the shadow of the great trees only two days after Cecil Mayford had proposed to Alice, and had been refused?

He came out of the forest shadow with the westering sunlight upon his face, riding slowly. She, as she looked, was proud to see what a fine seat he had on his horse, and how healthy and handsome he looked.

He rode round to the back of the house, and she went through to meet him. There was a square court behind, round which the house, huts, and store formed a quadrangle, neat and bright, with white quartz gravel. By the bye, there was a prospecting party who sank two or three shafts in the flat before the house last year; and I saw about eighteen penny-weights of gold which they

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took out. But it did not pay, and is abandoned. (This in passing, *à propos* of the quartz.)

"Is Tom Troubridge come home, mother?" said he, as he leaned out of the saddle to kiss her.

"Not yet, my boy," she said. "I am all alone. I should have had a dull week, but I knew you were enjoying yourself with your old friend at Garoopna. A great party there, I believe?"

"I am glad to get home, mother," he said. "We were jolly at first, but latterly Sam Buckley and Cecil Mayford have been looking at one another like cat and dog. Stay, though; let me be just; the fierce looks were all on Cecil Mayford's side."

"What was the matter?"

"Alice Brentwood was the matter, I rather suspect," he said, getting off his horse. "Hold him for me, mother, while I take the saddle off."

She did as requested. "And so they two are at loggerheads, eh, about Miss Brentwood? Of course. And what sort of a girl is she?"

"Oh, very pretty; deuced pretty, in fact. But there is one there takes my fancy better."

"Who is she?"

"Ellen Mayford; the sweetest little mouse—Dash it all; look at this horse's back. That comes of that infernal flash military groom of Jim's putting on the saddle without rubbing his back down. Where is the blue-stone?"

She went in and got it for him as naturally as if it was her place to obey, and his to command. She always waited on him, as a matter of course, save when Tom Troubridge was with them, who was apt to rap out something awkward about Charles being a lazy young hound, and about his waiting on himself, whenever he saw Mary yielding to that sort of thing.

"I wonder when Tom will be back?" resumed Charles.

"I have been expecting him this last week; he may

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come any night. I hope he will not meet any of those horrid bushrangers."

"Hope not either," said Charles; "they would have to go a hundred or two of miles out of their way to make it likely. Driving rams is slow work; they may not be here for a week."

"A nice price he has paid!"

"It will pay in the end, in the quality of the wool," said Charles.

They sat in silence. A little after, Charles had turned his horse out, when at once, without preparation, he said to her,—

"Mother, how long is it since my father died?"

She was very much startled. He had scarcely ever alluded to his father before; but she made shift to answer him quietly.

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen!" he said.

"Then he has been dead eighteen years. He died just as you were born. Never mention him, lad. He was a bad man, and by God's mercy you are delivered from him."

She rose and went into the house quite cheerfully. Why should she not? Why should not a handsome, still young, wealthy widow be cheerful? For she was a widow. For years after settling at Toonarbin, she had contrived, once in two or three years, to hear some news of her husband. After about ten years, she heard that he had been re-convicted, and sentenced to the chain-gang for life; and lastly, that he was dead. About his being sentenced for life, there was no doubt, for she had a piece of newspaper which told of his crime,—and a frightful piece of villany it was,—and after that, the report of his death was so probable that no one for an instant doubted its truth. Men did not live long in the chain-gang, in Van Diemen's Land, in those days, brother. Men would knock out one another's brains in order to get hung, and escape it. Men would cry

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aloud to the judge to hang them out of the way ! It was the most terrible punishment known, for it was hopeless. Penal servitude for life, as it is now, gives the very faintest idea of what it used to be in old times. With a little trouble I could tell you the weight of iron carried by each man. I cannot exactly remember, but it would strike you as being incredible. They were chained two and two together (a horrible association), to lessen the chances of escape ; there was no chance of mitigation for good conduct ; there was hard mechanical, uninteresting work, out of doors in an inclement climate, in all weathers : what wonder if men died off like rotten sheep ? And what wonder, too, if sometimes the slightest accident,—such as a blow from an overseer, returned by a prisoner, produced a sudden rising, unpreconcerted, objectless, the result of which were half a dozen murdered men, as many lunatic women, and five or six stations lighting up the hill-side, night after night, while the whole available force of the colony was unable to stop the ruin for months ?

But to the point. Mary was a widow. When she heard of her husband's death, she had said to herself, "Thank God !" But when she had gone to her room, and was sat a-thinking, she seemed to have had another husband before she was bound up with that desperate, coining, forging George Hawker—another husband bearing the same name ; but surely that handsome curly-headed young fellow, who used to wait for her so patiently in the orchard at Drumston, was not the same George Hawker as this desperate convict ? She was glad the convict was dead and out of the way ; there was no doubt of that ; but she could still find a corner in her heart to be sorry for her poor old lover,—her handsome old lover,—ah me !

But that even was passed now, and George Hawker was as one who had never lived. Now on this evening we speak of, his memory came back just an instant, as she heard the boy speak of the father, but it was gone again directly. She called her servants, and was telling them to bring

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supper, when Charles looked suddenly in, and said,—
“Here they are!”

There they were, sure enough, putting the rams into the sheep-yard. Tom Troubridge, as upright, brave-looking a man as ever, and, thanks to bush-work, none the fatter. William Lee, one of our oldest acquaintances, was getting a little grizzled, but otherwise looked as broad and strong as ever.

They rode into the yard, and Lee took the horses.

“Well, cousin,” said Tom; “I am glad to see you again.”

“You are welcome home, Tom; you have made good speed.”

Tom and Charles went into the house, and Mary was about following them, when Lee said, in so low a tone, that it did not reach the others,—“Mrs. Hawker!”

She turned round and looked at him; she had welcomed him kindly when he came into the yard with Tom, and yet he still stood on horseback, holding Tom’s horse by the bridle. A stern, square-looking figure he was; and when she looked at his face, she was much troubled, at—she knew not what.

“Mrs. Hawker,” he said, “can you give me the favour of ten minutes’ conversation alone, this evening?”

“Surely, William, now!”

“Not now,—my story is pretty long, and, what is more, ma’am, somebody may be listening, and what I have got to tell you must be told in no ear but your own.”

“You frighten me, Lee! You frighten me to death.”

“Don’t get frightened, Mrs. Hawker. Remember if anything comes about, that you have good friends about you; and, that I, William Lee, am not the worst of them.”

Lee went off with the horses, and Mary returned to the house. What mystery had this man to tell her, “that no one might hear but she”?—very strange and alarming! Was he drunk?—no, he was evidently quite sober; as she looked out once more, she could see him at the

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stable, cool and self-possessed, ordering the lads about : something very strange and terrifying to one who had such a dark blot in her life.

But she went in, and as she came near the parlour, she heard Charles and Tom roaring with laughter. As she opened the door she heard Tom saying: " And by Jove, I sat there like a great snipe, face to face with him, as cool and unconcerned as you like. I took him for a flash overseer, sporting his salary, and I was as thick as you like with him. And ' Matey,' says I, (you see I was familiar, he seemed such a jolly sort of bird), ' Matey, what station are you on?' ' Maraganoa,' says he. ' So,' says I, ' you're rather young there, ain't you. I was by there a fortnight ago.' He saw he'd made a wrong move, and made it worse. ' I mean,' says he, ' Maraganoa on the Clarence side.' ' Ah!' says I, ' in the Cedar country?' ' Precisely,' says he. And there we sat drinking together, and I had no more notion of its being him than you would have had."

She sat still listening to him, eating nothing. Lee's words outside had, she knew not why, struck a chill into her heart, and as she listened to Tom's story, although she could make nothing of it, she felt as though getting colder and colder. She shivered, although the night was hot. Through the open window she could hear all those thousand commingled indistinguishable sounds that make the night-life of the bush, with painful distinctness. She arose and went to the window.

The night was dark and profoundly still. The stars were overhead, though faintly seen through a haze ; and beyond the narrow enclosures in front of the house, the great forest arose like a black wall. Tom and Charles went on talking inside, and yet, though their voices were loud, she was hardly conscious of hearing them, but found herself watching the high dark wood and listening to the sound of the frogs in the creek, and the rustle of a million crawling things, heard only in the deep stillness of night.

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Deep in the forest somewhere, a bough cracked, and fell crashing, then all was silent, again. Soon arose a wind, a partial wandering wind, which came slowly up, and rousing the quivering leaves to life for a moment, passed away; then again a silence, deeper than ever, so that she could hear the cattle and horses feeding in the lower paddock, a quarter of a mile off; then a low wail in the wood, then two or three wild weird yells, as of a devil in torment, and a pretty white curlew skirled over the housetop to settle on the sheep-wash dam.

The stillness was awful; it boded a storm, for behind the forest blazed up a sheet of lightning, showing the shape of each fantastic elevated bough. Then she turned round to the light, and said,—

“My dear partner, I had a headache, and went to the window. What was the story you were telling Charles just now? Who was the man you met in the public-house, who seems to have frightened you so?”

“No less a man than Captain Touan, my dear cousin!” said Tom, leaning back with the air of a man who has made a point, and would be glad to hear “what you have to say to that, sir.”

“Touan?” repeated Mary. “Why, that’s the great bushranger, that is out to the north; is it not?”

“The same man, cousin! And there I sat hob and nob with him for half an hour in the ‘Lake George’ public-house. If Desborough had come in, he’d have hung me for being found in bad company. Ha! ha! ha!”

“My dear partner,” she said, “what a terrible escape! Suppose he had risen on you?”

“Why I’d have broken his back, cousin,” said Tom, “unless my right hand had forgot her cunning. He is a fine man of his weight: but, Lord, in a struggle for life and death, I could break his neck, and have one more claim on heaven for doing so; for he is the most damnable villain that ever disgraced God’s earth, and that is the truth. That man, cousin, in one of his devil’s raids, tore

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a baby from its mother's breast by the leg, dashed its brains out against a tree, and then—I daren't tell a woman what happened." *

"Tom! Tom!" said Mary, "how can you talk of such things?"

"To show you what we have to expect if he comes this way, cousin; that is all."

"And is there any possibility of such a thing?" asked Mary.

"Why not? Why should he not pay us the compliment of looking round this way?"

"Why do they call him Touan, Tom?" asked Charles.

"Can't you see?" said Tom; "the Touan, the little grey flying squirrel, only begins to fly about at night, and slides down from his bough sudden and sharp. This fellow has made some of his most terrible raids at night, and so he got the name of Touan."

"God deliver us from such monsters!" said Mary, and left the room.

She went into the kitchen. Lee sat there smoking. When she came in he rose, and, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, touched his forehead and stood looking at her.

"Now then, old friend," she said, "come here."

He followed her out. She led the way swiftly, through the silent night, across the yard, over a small paddock, up to the sheep-yard beside the woolshed. There she turned shortly round, and, leaning on the fence, said abruptly—

"No one can hear us here, William Lee. Now, what have you to say?"

He seemed to hesitate a moment, and then began: "Mrs. Hawker, have I been a good servant to you?"

*Tom was confusing Touan with Michael Howe. The latter actually did commit this frightful atrocity; but I never heard that the former actually combined the two crimes in this way. We must remember that barely four years from this present time (1858) a crime, exceeding this in atrocity, was committed in Van Diemen's Land, in open day. I refer to the murder of a lad returning from school.

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"Honest, faithful, kindly, active; who could have been a better servant than you, William Lee! A friend, and not a servant; God is my witness; now then?"

"I am glad to hear you say so," he answered. "I did you a terrible injury once; I have often been sorry for it since I knew you, but it cannot be mended now."

"Since you knew me?" she said. "Why, you have known me ever since I have been in the country, and you have never injured me since then, surely."

"Ay, but at home," he said. "In England. In Devonshire."

"My God!"

"I was your husband's companion in all his earlier villainies. I suggested them to him, and egged him on. And now, mind you, after twenty years, my punishment is coming."

She could only say still, "My God!" while her throat was as dry as a kiln.

"Listen to what I have got to tell you now. Hear it all in order, and try to bear up, and use your common sense and courage. As I said before, you have good friends around you, and you at least are innocent."

"Guilty! guilty!" she cried. "Guilty of my father's death! Read me this horrible riddle, Lee."

"Wait and listen," said Lee, unable to forego, even in her terror, the great pleasure that all his class have of spinning a yarn, and using as many words as possible. "See here. We came by Lake George, you know, and heard everywhere accounts of a great gang of bushrangers being out. So we didn't feel exactly comfortable, you see. We came by a bush public-house, and Mr. Troubridge stops, and says he, 'Well, lad, suppose we yard these rams an hour, and take drink in the parlour?' 'All right,' I says, with a wink, 'but the tap for me, if you please. That's my place, and I'd like to see if I can get any news of the whereabouts of the lads as are sticking up all round, because, if they're one way, I'd as lief be an-

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other.' 'All right,' says he. So in I goes, and sits down. There was nobody there but one man, drunk under the bench. And I has two noblers of brandy, and one of Old Tom; no, two Old Toms it was, and a brandy; when in comes an old chap as I knew for a lag in a minute. Well, he and I cottoned together, and found out that we had been prisoners together five-and-twenty years ago. And so I shouted for him, and he for me, and at last I says, 'Butty,' says I, 'who are these chaps round here on the lay' (meaning, Who are the bushrangers)? And he says, 'Young 'uns—no one as we know.' And I says, 'Not likely, matey; I've been on the square this twenty year.' 'Same here,' says the old chap; 'give us your flipper. And now,' says he, 'what sort of a cove is your boss' (meaning Mr. Troubridge)? One of the *real right sort*,' says I. 'Then see here,' says he, 'I'll tell you something: the head man of that there gang is at this minute a-sitting yarning with your boss in the parlour.' 'The devil!' says I. 'Is so,' says he, 'and no flies.' So I sings out, 'Mr. Troubridge, those sheep will be out;' and out he came running, and I whispers to him, 'Mind the man you're sitting with, and leave me to pay the score.' So he goes back, and presently he sings out, 'Will, have you got any money?' And I says, 'Yes, thirty shillings.' 'Then,' says he, 'pay for this, and come along.' And thinks I, I'll go in and have a look at this great new captain of bushrangers; so I goes to the parlour door, and now who do you think I saw?"

"I know," she said. "It was that horrible villain they call Touan."

"The same man," he answered. "Do you know who he is?"

She found somehow breath to say, "How can I? How is it possible?"

"I will tell you," said Lee. "There, sitting in front of Mr. Troubridge, hardly altered in all these long years, sat George Hawker, formerly of Drumston,—your husband!"

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She gave a low cry, and beat the hard rail with her head till it bled. Then, turning fiercely round, she said, in a voice hoarse and strangely altered,—

“Have you anything more to tell me, you croaking raven?”

He had something more to tell, but he dared not speak now. So he said, “Nothing at present, but if laying down my life——”

She did not wait to hear him, but, with her hands clasped above her head, she turned and walked swiftly towards the house. She could not cry, or sob, or rave; she could only say, “Let it fall on me, O God, on me!” over and over again.

Also, she was far too crushed and stunned to think precisely what it was she dreaded so. It seemed afterwards, as Frank Maberly told me, that she had an indefinable horror of Charles meeting his father, and of their coming to know one another. She half feared that her husband would appear and carry away her son with him, and even if he did not, the lad was reckless enough as it was, without being known and pointed at through the country as the son of Hawker the bushranger.

These were after-thoughts, however; at present she leaned giddily against the house-side, trying, in the wild hurrying night-rack of her thoughts, to distinguish some tiny star of hope, or even some glimmer of reason. Impossible! Nothing but swift, confused clouds everywhere, driving wildly on,—whither?

But a desire came upon her to see her boy again, and compare his face to his father's. So she slid quietly into the room where Tom and Charles were still talking together of Tom's adventure, and sat looking at the boy, pretending to work. As she came in, he was laughing loudly at something, and his face was alive and merry. “He is not like what his father was at his age,” she said.

But they continued their conversation. “And now,

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what sort of man was he, Tom?" said Charles. "Was he like any one you ever saw?"

"Why, no. Stay, let's see. Do you know, he was something like you in the face."

"Thank you!" said Charles, laughing. "Wait till I get a chance of paying you a compliment, old fellow. A powerful fellow—eh?"

"Why, yes,—a tough-looking subject," said Tom.

"I shouldn't have much chance with him, I suppose?"

"No; he'd be too powerful for you, Charley."

A change came over his face, a dark, fierce look. Mary could see the likeness *now* plain enough, and even Tom looked at him for an instant with a puzzled look.

"Nevertheless," continued Charles, "I would have a turn with him if I met him. I'd try what six inches of cold steel between——"

"Forbear, boy! Would you have the roof fall in and crush you dead?" said Mary, in a voice that appalled both of them. "Stop such foolish talk, and pray that we may be delivered from the very sight of these men, and suffered to get away to our graves in peace, without any more of these horrors and surprises. I would sooner," she said, increasing in rapidity as she went on, "I would far sooner, live like some one I have heard of, with a sword above his head, than thus. If he comes and looks on me, I shall die."

She had risen and stood in the firelight, deadly pale. Somehow one of the bands of her long black hair had fallen down, and half covered her face. She looked so unearthly that, coupling her appearance with the wild, senseless words she had been uttering, Tom had a horrible suspicion that she was gone mad.

"Cousin," he said, "let me beseech you to go to bed. Charles, run for Mrs. Barker. Mary," he added, as soon as he was gone, "come away, or you'll be saying something before that boy you'll be sorry for. You're hysteri-

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cal ; that's what is the matter with you. I am afraid we have frightened you by our talk about bushrangers."

"Yes, that is it ! that is it !" she said ; and then, suddenly, "Oh ! my dear old friend, you will not desert me ?"

"Never, Mary ; but why ask such a question now ?"

"Ask Lee," she said, and the next moment Mrs. Barker, the housekeeper, came bustling in with smelling-salts, and so on, to minister to a mind diseased. And Mary was taken off to bed.

"What on earth can be the matter with her, cousin Tom ?" said Charles, when she was gone.

"She is out of sorts, and got hysterical ; that's what it is," said Tom.

"What odd things she said !"

"Women do when they are hysterical. It's nothing more than that."

But Mrs. Barker came in with a different opinion. She said that Mary was very hot and restless, and had very little doubt that a fever was coming on. "Terribly shaken she had been," said Mrs. Barker, "hoped nothing was wrong."

"There's something decidedly wrong, if your mistress is going to have a fever," said Tom. "Charley, do you think Doctor Mulhaus is at Baroona or Garoopna ?"

"Up at the Major's," said Charles. "Shall I ride over for him ? There will be a good moon in an hour."

"Yes," said Tom, "and fetch him over at once. Tell him we think it's a fever, and he will know what to bring. Ride like h—l, Charley."

As soon as he was alone, he began thinking. "What the *doose* is the matter ?" was his first exclamation, and, after half-an-hour's cogitation, only had arrived at the same point, "What the *doose* is the matter ?" Then it flashed across him, what did she mean by "ask Lee" ? Had she any meaning in it, or was it nonsense ? There was an easy solution for it ; namely, to ask Lee. And so arising he went across the yard to the kitchen.]

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Lee was bending low over the fire, smoking. "William," said Tom, "I want to see you in the parlour."

"I was thinking of coming across myself," said Lee. "In fact I should have come when I had finished my pipe."

"Bring your pipe across, then," said Tom. "Girl, take in some hot water and tumblers."

"Now, Lee," said Tom, as soon as Lee had gone through the ceremony of "Well, here's my respex, sir;" "now Lee, you have heard how ill the mistress is."

"I have indeed, sir," said he; "and very sorry I am, as I am partly the cause of it."

"All that simplifies matters, Will, considerably," said Tom. "I must tell you that when I asked her what put her in that state, she said, 'Ask Lee.'"

"Shows her sense, sir. What she means is, that you ought to hear what she and I have heard; and I mean to tell you more than I have her. If she knew everything, I am afraid it would kill her."

"Ay! I know nothing as yet, you know."

Lee in the first place put him in possession of what we already know—the fact of Hawker's reappearance, and his identity with "The Touan;" then he paused.

"This is very astonishing, and very terrible, Lee," said he. "Is there anything further?"

"Yes, the worst. That man has followed us home!"

Tom had exhausted all his expressions of astonishment and dismay before this; so now he could only give a long whistle, and say, "Followed us home?"

"Followed us home!" said Lee. "As we were passing the black swamp, not two miles from here, this very morning, I saw that man riding parallel with us through the bush."

"Why did not you tell me before?"

"Because I had not made up my mind how to act. First I resolved to tell the mistress; that I did. Then after I had smoked a pipe, I resolved to tell you, and that I did, and now here we are, you see."

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That was undeniable. There they were, with about as pretty a complication of mischief to unravel as two men could wish to have. Tom felt so foolish and nonplussed, that he felt inclined to laugh at Lee, when he said, "Here we are." It so exactly expressed the state of the case; as if he had said, "All so and so has happened, and a deuce of a job it is, and here sit you and I, to deliberate what's to be done with regard to so and so."

He did not laugh, however; he bit his lip, and stopped it. Then he rose, and, leaning his great shoulders against the mantelpiece, stood before the fireless grate, and looked at Lee. Lee also looked at him, and I think that each one thought what a splendid specimen of his style the other was. If they did not think so, "they ought to it," as the Londoners say. But neither spoke a few minutes; then Tom said,—

"Lee, Will Lee, though you came to me a free man, and have served me twenty years, or thereabouts, as free man, I don't conceal from myself the fact, that you have been convict. Pish, man! don't let us mince matters now, —a lag."

Lee looked him full in the face without changing countenance, and nodded.

"Convicted more than once, too," continued Tom.

"Three times," said Lee.

"Ah!" said Tom. "And if a piece of work was set before me to do, which required pluck, honesty, courage, and cunning, and one were to say to me, 'Who will you have to help you?' I would answer out boldly, 'Give me Will Lee, the lag; my old friend, who has served me so true and hearty these twenty years.'"

"And you'd do right, sir," said Lee quietly. And rising up, he stood beside Tom, with one foot on the fender, bending down and looking into the empty grate.

"Now, Will," said Tom, turning round and laying his hand on his shoulder, "this fellow has followed us home, having found out who we were. Why has he done so?"

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"Evident," said Lee, "to work on the fears of the mistress, and get some money from her."

"Good!" said Tom. "Well answered. We shall get to the bottom of our difficulty like this. Only answer the next question as well, and I will call you a Polly—, Polly—; d—n the Greek."

"Not such a bad name as that, I hope, sir," said Lee, smiling. "Who might she have been? A bad un, I expect. You don't happen to refer to Hobart-town Polly, did you, sir?"

"Hold your tongue, you villain," said Tom, "or you'll make me laugh; and these are not laughing times."

"Well, what is your question, sir?" asked Lee.

"Why, simply this: What are we to do?"

"I'll tell you," said Lee, speaking in an animated whisper. "Watch, watch, and watch again, till you catch him. Tie him tight, and hand him over to Captain Desborough. He may be about the place to-night: he will be sure to be. Let us watch to-night, you and I, and for many nights, till we catch him."

"But," whispered Tom, "he will be hung."

"He has earned it," said Lee. "Let him be hung."

"But he is her husband," urged Tom, in a whisper. "He is that boy's father. I cannot do it. Can't we buy him off?"

"Yes," answered Lee in the same tone, "till his money is gone. Then you will have a chance of doing it again, and again, all your life."

"This is a terrible dilemma," said Tom; and added in a perplexity almost comical, "Drat the girl! Why didn't she marry poor old Jim Stockbridge, or sleepy Hamlyn, or even your humble servant? Though, in all honour I must confess that I never asked her, as those two others did. No! I'll tell you what, Lee: we will watch for him, and catch him if we can. After that we will think what is to be done. By the bye, I have been going to ask you:—do you think he recognised you at the public-house there?"

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"That puzzles me," said Lee. "He looked me in the face, but I could not see that he did. I wonder if he recognised you?"

"I never saw him in my life before," said Tom. "It is very likely that he knew me, though. I was champion of Devon and Cornwall, you know, before little Abraham Cann kicked my legs from under me that unlucky Easter Monday. (The deuce curl his hair for doing it!) I never forgave him till I heard of that fine bit of play with Polkinghorn. Yes! he must have known me."

Lee lit the fire, while Tom, blowing out the candles, drew the curtains, so that any one outside could not see into the room. Nevertheless, he left the French window open, and then went outside, and secured all the dogs in the dog-house.

The night was wonderfully still and dark. As he paused before entering the house, he could hear the bark falling from the trees a quarter of a mile off, and the opossums scratching and snapping little twigs as they passed from bough to bough. Somewhere, apparently at an immense distance, a morepork was chanting his monotonous cry. The frogs in the creek were silent even, so hot was the night. "A good night for watching," said he to Lee when he came in. "Lie you down; I'll take the first watch."

They blew out the candle, and Lee was in the act of lying down, when he arrested himself, and held up his finger to Tom.

They both listened, motionless and in silence, until they could hear the spiders creeping on the ceiling. There it was again! a stealthy step on the gravel.

Troubridge and Lee crouched down breathless. One minute, two, five, but it did not come again. At length they both moved, as if by concert, and Lee said, "'Possum."

"Not a bit," said Troubridge; and then Lee lay down again, and slept in the light of the flickering fire. One

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giant arm was thrown around his head, and the other hung down in careless grace ; the great chest was heaved up, and the head thrown back ; the seamed and rugged features seemed more stern and marked than ever in the chiaroscuro ; and the whole man was a picture of reckless strength such as one seldom sees. Tom had dozed and had awoke again, and now sat thinking. " What a terrible tough customer that fellow would be ! " when suddenly he crouched on the floor, and, reaching out his hand, touched Lee, who woke, and silently rolled over with his face towards the window.

There was no mistake this time—that was no opossum. There came the stealthy step again ; and now, as they lay silent, the glass-door was pushed gently open, showing the landscape beyond. The gibbous moon was just rising over the forest, all blurred with streaky clouds, and between them and her light they could see the figure of a man, standing inside the room.

Tom could wait no longer. He started up, and fell headlong with a crash over a little table that stood in his way. They both dashed into the garden, but only in time to hear flying footsteps, and immediately after the gallop of a horse, the echoes of which soon died away, and all was still.

" Missed him, by George ! " said Lee. " It was a precious close thing, though. What could he mean by coming into the house,—eh ? "

" Just as I expected ; trying to get an interview with the mistress. He will be more cautious in future I take it. "

" I wonder if he will try again ? "

" Don't know, " said Troubridge ; " he might : not to-night, however. "

They went in and lay down again, and Troubridge was soon asleep ; and very soon that sleep was disturbed by dreadful dreams. At one time he thought he was riding madly through the bush for his bare life ; spurring on a tired horse, which was failing every moment more and

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more. But always through the tree-stems on his right he saw glancing, a ghost on a white horse, which kept pace with him, do what he would. Now he was among the precipices on the ranges. On his left, a lofty inaccessible cliff; on the right, a frightful blue abyss; while the slaty soil kept sliding from beneath his horse's feet. Behind him, unseen, came a phantom, always gaining on him, and driving him along the giddiest wallaby tracks. If he could only turn and face it, he might conquer, but he dare not. At length the path grew narrower and narrower, and he turned in desperation and awoke—woke to see in the dim morning light a dark figure bending over him. He sprang up, and clutched it by the throat.

"A most excellent fellow this!" said the voice of Dr. Mulhaus. "He sends a frantic midnight message for his friend to come to him, regardless of personal convenience and horseflesh; and when this friend comes quietly in, and tries to wake him without disturbing the sick folks, he seizes him by the throat and nearly throttles him."

"I beg a thousand pardons, Doctor," said Tom; "I had been dreaming, and I took you for the devil. I am glad to find my mistake."

"You have good reason," said the Doctor; "but now, how is the patient?"

"Asleep at present, I believe; the housekeeper is with her."

"What is the matter with her?"

"She has had a great blow. It has shaken her intellect, I am afraid."

"What sort of a blow?" asked the Doctor.

Tom hesitated. He did not know whether to tell him or not.

"Nay," said the Doctor, "you had better let me know. I can help then, you know. Now, for instance, has she heard of her husband?"

"She has, Doctor. How on earth came you to guess that?"

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“A mere guess, though I have always thought it quite possible, as the accounts of his death were very uncertain.”

Tom then set to work, and told the Doctor all that we know. He looked very grave. “This is far worse than I had thought,” he said, and remained thoughtful.

Mary awoke in a fever and delirious. They kept Charles as much from her as possible, lest she should let drop some hint of the matter to the boy; but even in her delirium she kept her secret well; and towards the evening the Doctor, finding her quieter, saddled his horse, and rode away ten miles to a township, where resided a drunken surgeon, one of the greatest blackguards in the country.

The surgeon was at home. He was drunk, of course; he always was, but hardly more so to-day than usual. So the Doctor hoped for success in his object, which was to procure a certain drug which was neither in the medicine-chest at the Buckleys’ nor at Toonarbin; and putting on his sweetest smile when the surgeon came to the door, he made a remark about the beauty of the weather, to which the other very gruffly responded.

“I come to beg a favour,” said Dr. Mulhaus. “Can you let me have a little—so and so?”

“See you d—d first,” was the polite reply. “A man comes a matter of fourteen thousand miles, makes a pretty little practice, and then gets it cut into by a parcel of ignorant foreigners, whose own country is too hot to hold them. And not content with this, they have the brass to ask for the loan of a man’s drugs. As I said before, I’ll see you d—d first, AND THEN I WON’T.” And so saying, he slammed the door.

Dr. Mulhaus was beside himself with rage. For the first and last time since I have known him he forgot his discretion, and instead of going away quietly, and treating the man with contempt, he began kicking at the door, calling the man a scoundrel, &c., and between the inter-

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vals of kicking, roaring through the keyhole, "Bring out your diploma; do you hear, you impostor?" and then fell to work kicking again. "Bring out your forged diploma, will you, you villain?"

This soon attracted the idlers from the public-house: a couple of sawyers, a shepherd or two, all tipsy of course, except one of the sawyers, who was drunk. The drunken sawyer at length made out to his own complete satisfaction that Dr. Mulhaus' wife was in labour, and that he was come for the surgeon, who was probably drunk and asleep inside. So, being able to sympathise, having had his wife in the straw every thirteen months regularly for the last fifteen years, he prepared to assist, and for this purpose took a stone about half a hundredweight, and coming behind the Doctor, when he was in full kick, he balanced himself with difficulty, and sent it at the lock with all the force of his arm, and of course broke the door in. In throwing the stone, he lost his balance, came full butt against Dr. Mulhaus, propelled him into the passage, into the arms of the surgeon, who was rushing out infuriated to defend his property, and down went the three in the passage together, the two doctors beneath, and the drunken sawyer on the top of them.

The drunken surgeon, if, to use parliamentary language, he will allow me to call him so, was of course underneath the others; but, being a Londoner, and consequently knowing the use of his fists, ere he went down delivered a "one, two," straight from the shoulder in our poor dear Doctor's face, and gave him a most disreputable black eye, besides cutting his upper lip open. This our Doctor, being, you must remember, a foreigner, and not having the rules of the British Ring before his eyes, resented by getting on the top of him, taking him round the throat, and banging the back of his head against the brick floor of the passage, until he began to goggle his eyes and choke. Meanwhile the sawyer, exhilarated beyond measure in his drunken mind at having raised a real good promising row,

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having turned on his back, lay procumbent upon the twain, and kicking everything soft and human he came across with his heels, struck up "The Bay of Biscay, Oh," until he was dragged forth by two of his friends ; and being in a state of wild excitement, ready to fight the world, hit his own mate a violent blow in the eye, and was only quieted by receiving a sound thrashing, and being placed in a sitting posture in the verandah of the public-house, from which he saw Dr. Mulhaus come forth from the surgeon's with ruffled feathers, but triumphant.

I am deeply grieved to have recorded the above scene, but I could not omit it. Having undertaken to place the character of that very noble gentleman, Dr. Mulhaus, before my readers, I was forced not to omit this. As a general rule, he was as self-contained, as calm and as frigid as the best Englishman among us. But under all this there was, to speak in carefully-selected scientific language, a substratum of pepper-box, which has been apparent to me on more than one occasion. I have noticed the above occasion per force. Let the others rest in oblivion. A man so true, so wise, so courteous, and so kindly, needs not my poor excuses for having once in a way made a fool of himself. He will read this, and he will be angry with me for a time, but he knows well that I, like all who knew him, say heartily, God bless you, old Doctor !

But the consequences of the above were, I am sorry to say, eminently disastrous. The surgeon got a warrant against Dr. Mulhaus for burglary with violence, and our Doctor got a warrant against him for assault with intent to rob. So there was the deuce to pay. The affair got out of the hands of the bench. In fact they sent *both* parties for trial, (what do you think of that, my Lord Campbell ?) in order to get rid of the matter, and at sessions, the surgeon swore positively that Dr. Mulhaus had, assisted by a convict, battered his door down with stones in open day, and nearly murdered him. Then in defence Dr. Mulhaus called the sawyer, who, as it happened,

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had just completed a contract for fencing for Mrs. Mayford, the proceeds of which bargain he was spending at the public-house when the thing happened, and had just undertaken another for one of the magistrates; having also a large family dependent on him; being, too, a man who prided himself in keeping an eye to windward, and being slightly confused by a trifling attack of delirium tremens (diddleums, he called it): he, I say, to our Doctor's confusion and horror, swore positively that he never took a stone in his hand on the day in question; that he never saw a stone for a week before or after that date: that he did not deny having rushed into the passage to assist the complainant (drunken surgeon), seeing him being murdered by defendant; and, lastly, that he was never near the place on the day specified. So it would have gone hard with our Doctor, had not his Honour called the jury's attention to the discrepancies in this witness's evidence; and when Dr. Mulhaus was acquitted, delivered a stinging reproof to the magistrates for wasting public time by sending such a trumperry case to a jury. But, on the other hand, Dr. Mulhaus' charge of assault with intent, fell dead; so that neither party had much to boast of.

The night or so after the trial was over, the Doctor came back to Toonarbin, in what he intended for a furious rage. But, having told Tom Troubridge the whole affair, and having unluckily caught Tom's eye, they two went off into such hearty fits of laughter that poor Mary, now convalescent, but still in bed, knocked at the wall to know what the matter was.

Chapter VI

THE state of terror and dismay into which poor Mary Hawker was thrown on finding that her husband, now for many years the *bête noire* of her existence, was not only alive, but promising fairly to cause her more trouble than

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ever he did before, superadded, let me say, for mere truth's sake, to a slight bilious attack, brought on by good living and want of exercise, threw her into a fever, from which, after several days' delirium, she rose much shattered, and looking suddenly older. All this time the Doctor, like a trusty dog, had kept his watch, and done more, and with a better will than any paid doctor would have been likely to do. He was called away a good deal by the prosecution arising out of that unhappy affair with the other doctor, and afterwards with a prosecution for perjury, which he brought against the sawyer; but he was generally back at night, and was so kind, so attentive, and so skilful that Mary took it into her head, and always affirmed afterwards, that she owed her life to him.

She was not one to receive any permanent impression from anything. So now, as day by day she grew stronger, she tried to undervalue the mischief which had at first so terrified her, and caused her illness;—tried, and with success, in broad daylight; but, in the silent dark nights, as she lay on her lonely bed, she would fully appreciate the terrible cloud that hung over her, and would weep and beat her pillow, and pray in her wild fantastic way to be delivered from this frightful monster, cut off from communion with all honest men by his unutterable crimes, but who, nevertheless, she was bound to love, honour, and obey, till death should part her from him.

Mrs. Buckley, on the first news of her illness, had come up and taken her quarters at Toonarbin, acting as gentle a nurse as man or woman could desire to have. She took possession of the house, and managed everything. Mrs. Barker, the housekeeper, the only one who did not submit at once to her kindly rule, protested, obstructed, protocolled, presented an ultimatum, and, at last, was so ill advised as to take up arms. There was a short campaign, lasting only one morning,—a decisive battle,—and Mrs. Barker was compelled to sue for peace. “Had Mr. Troubridge been true to himself,” she said, “she would never

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have submitted ; " but, having given Tom warning, and Tom, in a moment of irritation, having told her, without hesitation or disguise, to go to the devil (no less), she bowed to the circumstances, and yielded.

Agnes Buckley encouraged Dr. Mulhaus, too, in his legal affairs, and, I fear, was the first person who proposed the prosecution for perjury against the sawyer : a prosecution, however, which failed, in consequence of his mate and another friend, who was present at the affair, coming forward to the sawyer's rescue, and getting into such a labyrinth and mist of perjury, that the Bench (this happened just after quarter sessions) positively refused to hear anything more on either side. Altogether, Agnes Buckley made herself so agreeable, and kept them all so alive, that Tom wondered how he had got on so long without her.

At the end of three weeks Mary was convalescent ; and one day, when she was moved into the verandah, Mrs. Buckley beside her, Tom and the Doctor sitting on the step smoking, and Charles sleepily reading aloud " Hamlet," with a degree of listlessness and want of appreciation unequalled, I should say, by any reader before ; at such time, I say, there entered suddenly to them a little cattle-dealer, as brimful of news as an egg of meat. Little Burnside it was : a man about eight stone nothing, who always wore top-boots and other people's clothes. As he came in, Charles recognised on his legs a pair of cord breeches of his own, with a particular grease patch on the thigh : a pair of breeches he had lent Burnside, and which Burnside had immediately got altered to his own size. A good singer was Burnside. A man who could finish his bottle of brandy, and not go to bed in his boots. A man universally liked and trusted. An honest, hearty, little fellow, yet one who always lent or spent his money as fast as he got it, and was as poor as Job. The greatest vehicle of news in the district, too. " Snowy river Times," he used to be called.

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After the usual greetings, Tom, seeing he was bursting with something, asked him, "What's the news?"

Burnside was in the habit of saying that he was like the Lord Mayor's fool—fond of everything that was good. But his greatest pleasure, the one to which he would sacrifice everything, was retailing a piece of news. This was so great an enjoyment with him that he gloried in dwelling on it, and making the most of it. He used to retail a piece of news, as a perfect novel, in three volumes. In his first he would take care to ascertain that you were acquainted with the parties under discussion; and, if you were not, make you so, throwing in a few anecdotes illustrative of their characters. In his second, he would grow discursive, giving an episode or two, and dealing in moral reflections and knowledge of human nature rather largely. And in his third he would come smash, crash down on you with the news itself, and leave you gasping.

He followed this plan on the present occasion. He answered Tom's question by asking,—

"Do you know Desborough?"

"Of course I do," said Tom; "and a noble good fellow he is."

"Exactly," said Burnside; "super of police; distinguished in Indian wars; nephew of my Lord Covetown. An Irishman is Desborough, but far from objectionable."

This by way of first volume: now comes his second:—

"Now, sir, I, although a Scotchman born, and naturally proud of being so, consider that until these wretched national distinctions between the three great nations are obliterated we shall never get on, sir; never. That the Scotch, sir, are physically and intellectually superior——"

"Physically and intellectually the devil," burst in Tom. "Pick out any dozen Scotchmen, and I'll find you a dozen Londoners who will fight them, or deal with them till they'd be glad to get over the borders again. As for the Devon and Cornish lads, find me a Scotchman who will put me on my back, and I'll write you a cheque for a hun-

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dred pounds, my boy. We English opened the trade of the world to your little two millions and a half up in the north there; and you, being pretty well starved out at home, have had the shrewdness to take advantage of it; and now, by Jove, you try to speak small of the bridge that carried you over. What did you do towards licking the Spaniards, eh? And where would you be now, if they had not been licked in 1588, eh? Not in Australia, my boy! A Frenchman is conceited enough, but, by George, he can't hold a candle to a Scotchman."

Tom spoke in a regular passion; but there was some truth in what he said, I think. Burnside didn't like it, and merely saying, "You interrupt me, sir," went on to his third volume without a struggle.

"You are aware, ladies, that there has been a gang of bushrangers out to the north, headed by a miscreant, whom his companions call Touan, but whose real name is a mystery."

Mrs. Buckley said, "Yes;" and Tom glanced at Mary. She had grown as pale as death, and Tom said, "Courage, cousin; don't be frightened at a name."

"Well, sir," continued Burnside, putting the forefinger and thumb of each hand together, as if he was making "windows" with soapsuds, "Captain Desborough has surprised that gang in a gully, sir, and," spreading his hands out right and left, "obliterated them."

"The devil!" said Tom, while the Doctor got up and stood beside Mary.

"Smashed them, sir," continued Burnside; "extinguished them utterly. He had six of his picked troopers with him, and they came on them suddenly and brought them to bay. You see, two troopers have been murdered lately, and so our men, when they got face to face with the cowardly hounds, broke discipline and wouldn't be held. They hardly fired a shot, but drew their sabres, and cut the dogs down almost to a man. Three only out of twelve have been captured alive, and one of them is dy-

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ing of a wound in the neck." And, having finished, little Burnside folded his arms and stood in a military attitude, with the air of a man who had done the thing himself, and was prepared to receive his meed of praise with modesty.

"Courage, Mary," said Tom; "don't be frightened at shadows."—He felt something sticking in his throat, but spoke out nevertheless.

"And their redoubted captain," he asked; "what has become of him?"

"What, Touan himself?" said Burnside. "Well, I am sorry to say that that chivalrous and high-minded gentleman was found neither among the dead nor the living. Not to mince matters, sir, he has escaped."

The Doctor saw Mary's face quiver, but she bore up bravely, and listened.

"Escaped, has he?" said Tom. "And do they know anything about him?"

"Desborough, who told me this himself," said Burnside, "says no, that he is utterly puzzled. He had made sure of the arch-rascal himself; but, with that remarkable faculty of saving his own skin which he has exhibited on more than one occasion, he has got off for the time, with one companion."

"A companion; eh?"

"Yes," said Burnside, "whereby hangs a bit of romance, if I may profane the word in speaking of such men. His companion is a young fellow, described as being more like a beautiful woman than a man, and bearing the most singular likeness in features to the great Captain Touan himself, who, as you have heard, is a handsome dog. In short, there is very little doubt that they are father and son."

Tom thought to himself, "Who on earth can this be? What son can George Hawker have, and we not know of it?" He turned to Burnside.

"What age is the young man you speak of?" he asked.

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"Twenty, or thereabouts, by all description," said the other.

Tom thought again: "This gets very strange. He could have no son of that age got in Van Diemen's Land: it was eight years before he was free. It must be some one we know of. He had some byeblooms in Devon, by all accounts. If this is one of them, how the deuce did he get here?"

But he could not think. We shall see presently who it was. Now we must leave these good folks for a time, and just step over to Garoopna, and see how affairs go there.

Chapter VII

In which James Brentwood and Samuel Buckley, Esquires, combine to disturb the rest of Captain Brentwood, R.A., and succeed in doing so

THE morning after Cecil Mayford had made his unlucky offer to Alice, he appeared at Sam's bedside very early, as if he had come to draw Priam's curtains; and told him shortly, that he had spoken, and had been received with contempt; that he was a miserable brute, and that he was going back home to attend to his business;—under the circumstances, the best thing he could possibly do.

So the field was clear for Sam, but he let matters stay as they were, being far too pleasant to disturb lightly; being also, to tell the truth, a little uncertain of his ground, after poor Cecil had suffered so severely in the encounter. The next day, too, his father and mother went home, and he thought it would be only proper for him to go with them, but, on proposing it, Jim quietly told him he must stay where he was and work hard for another week, and Halbert, although a guest of the Buckleys, was constrained to remain still at the Brentwoods', in company with Sam.

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But at the end of a week they departed, and Jim went back with them, leaving poor Alice behind, alone with her father. Sam turned when they had gone a little way, and saw her white figure still in the porch, leaning in rather a melancholy attitude against the door-post. The audacious magpie had perched himself on the top of her head, from which proud elevation he hurled wrath, scorn, and mortal defiance against them as they rode away. Sam took off his hat, and as he went on kept wondering whether she was thinking of him at all, and hoping that she might be sorry that he was gone. "Probably, however," he thought, "she is only sorry for her brother."

They three stayed at Baroona a week or more, one of them riding up every day to ask after Mary Hawker. Otherwise they spent their time shooting and fishing, and speculating how soon the rains would come, for it was now March, and autumn was fairly due.

But at the end of this week, as the three were sitting together, one of those long-legged, slab-sided, lean, sun-burnt, cabbage-tree-hatted lads, of whom Captain Brentwood kept always, say half-a-dozen, and the Major four or five (I should fancy, no relation to one another, and yet so exactly alike, that Captain Brentwood never called them by their right names by any chance); lads who were employed about the stable and the paddock, always in some way with the horses; one of those representatives of the rising Australian generation, I say, looked in, and without announcing himself, or touching his hat (an Australian never touches his hat if he is a free man, because the prisoners are forced to), came up to Jim across the drawing-room, as quiet and self-possessed as if he was quite used to good society, and, putting a letter in his hand, said merely, "Miss Alice," and relapsed into silence, amusing himself by looking round Mrs. Buckley's drawing-room, the like of which he had never seen before.

Sam envied Jim the receipt of that little three-cornered note. He wondered whether there was anything about

him in it. Jim read it, and then folded it up again, and said "Hallo!"

The lad,—I always call that sort of individual a lad; there is no other word for them, though they are of all ages, from sixteen to twenty,—the lad, I say, was so taken up with the contemplation of a blown-glass presse-papier on the table, that Jim had to say, "Hallo there, John!"

The lad turned round, and asked in a perfectly easy manner, "What the deuce is this thing for, now?"

"That," said Jim, "is the button of a Chinese mandarin's hat, who was killed at the battle of Waterloo in the United States by Major Buckley."

"Is it now?" said the lad, quite contented. "It's very pretty; may I take it up?"

"Of course you may," said Jim. "Now, what's the foal like?"

"Rather leggy, *I* should say," he returned. "Is there any answer?"

Jim wrote a few lines with a pencil on half his sister's note, and gave it him. He put it in the lining of his hat, and had got as far as the door, when he turned again. He looked wistfully towards the table where the presse-papier was lying. It was too much for him. He came back and took it up again. What he wanted with it, or what he would have done with it if he had got it, I cannot conceive, but it had taken his simple fancy more, probably, than an emerald of the same size would have done. At last he put it to his eye.

"Why, darn my cabbage-tree," he said, "if you can't see through it! He wouldn't sell it, I suppose, now?"

Jim pursed his lips and shook his head, as though to say that such an idea was not to be entertained, and the lad, with a sigh, laid it down and departed. Then Jim with a laugh threw his sister's note over to Sam. I discovered this very same note only last week, while searching the Buckley papers for information about the family at this period. I have reason to believe that it has never

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been printed before, and, as far as I know, there is no other copy extant, so I proceed to give it in full.

"What a dear, disagreeable old Jim you are," it begins, "to stay away there at Baroona, leaving me moping here with our daddy, who is calculating the explosive power of shells under water at various temperatures. I have a good mind to learn the Differential Calculus myself, only on purpose to bore you with it when you come home.

"By the bye, Corrella has got a foal. Such a dear little duck of a thing, with a soft brown nose, and sweet long ears, like leaves! Do come back and see it; I am so very, very lonely!

"I hope Mr. Halbert is pretty well, and that his wound is getting quite right again. Don't let him undertake cattle-drafting or anything violent. I wish you could bring him back with you, he is such a nice, agreeable creature.

"Your magpie * has attacked cocky, and pulled a yellow feather out of his crest, which he has planted in the flower-bed, either as a trophy, or to see if it will grow."

Now this letter is historically important, when taken in connexion with certain dates in my possession. It was written on a Monday, and Halbert, Jim, and Sam started back to Garoopna the next day, rather a memorable day for Sam, as you will see directly. Now I wish to call attention to the fact, that Sam, far from being invited, is never once mentioned in the whole letter. Therefore what does Miss Burke mean by her audacious calumnies? What does she mean by saying that Alice made love to Sam, and never gave the "poor boy" a chance of escape? Can she, Lesbia, put her hand on her heart and say that

*Magpie, a large, pied crow. Of all the birds I have ever seen, the cleverest, the most grotesque, and the most musical. The splendid melody of his morning and evening song is as unequalled as it is indescribable.

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she wasn't dying to marry Sam herself, though she was (and is still, very likely) thirty years his senior? The fact is, Lesbia gave herself the airs, and received the privileges of being the handsomest woman in those parts, till Alice came, and put her nose out of joint, for which she never forgave her.

However, to return to this letter. I wonder now, as I am looking at the age-stained paper and faded writing, whether she who wrote it contemplated the possibility of its meeting Sam's eye. I rather imagine that she did, from her provoking silence about him. At any rate, Jim was quite justified in showing him the letter, "for you know," he said, "as there is nothing at all about you in it, there can be no breach of confidence."

"Well!" said Sam, when he had read it.

"Well!" said Jim. "Let us all three ride over and look at the foal."

So they went, and were strictly to be home at dinner-time; whereas not one of them came home for a week.

When they came to the door at Garoopna, there was Alice, most bewitchingly beautiful. Papa was away on the run, and Dr. Mulhaus with him; so the three came in. Alice was very glad to see Halbert—was glad also to see Sam; but not so glad, or, at all events, did not say so much about it.

"Alice, have you seen the newspaper?" said Jim.

"No; why?"

"There is a great steamer gone down at sea, and three hundred persons drowned." *

"What a horrible thing! I should never have courage to cross the sea."

"You would soon get accustomed to it, I think," said Halbert.

"I have never even seen it as yet," she said, "save at a distance."

"Strange, neither have I," said Sam. "I have dim rec-

*Can this be the "President"?—H. K.

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ollections of 'our voyage here, but I never stood upon the shore in my life."

"I have beat you there," said Jim. "I have been down to Cape Chatham, and seen the great ocean itself: a very different thing from Sydney Harbour, I promise you. You see the great Cape running out a mile into the sea, and the southern rollers tumbling in over the reefs like cascades."

"Let us go and see it!—how far is it?" said Alice.

"About thirty miles. The Barkers' station is about half a mile from the Cape, and we could sleep there, you know."

"It strikes me as being a most brilliant idea," said Sam.

And so the arrangement was agreed to, and the afternoon went on pleasantly. Alice walked up and down with Sam among the flowers, while Jim and Halbert lay beneath a mulberry tree and smoked.

They talked on a subject which had engaged their attention a good deal lately. Jim's whim for going soldiering had grown and struck root, and become a determination. He would go back to India when Halbert did, supposing that his father could be tempted to buy him a commission. Surely he might manage to join some regiment in India, he thought. India was the only place worth living in just now.

"I hope, Halbert," he said, "that the governor will consent. I wouldn't care when I went; the sooner the better. I am tired of being a cattle-dealer on a large scale; I want to get at some *man's* work. If one thing were settled I would go to-morrow."

"And what is that?" said Halbert.

Jim said nothing, but looked at the couple among the flower-beds.

"Is that all?" said Halbert. "What will you bet me that that affair is not concluded to-night?"

"I'll bet you five pounds to one it ain't," said Jim;

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"nor any time this twelvemonth. They'll go on shilly-shallying half their lives, I believe."

"Nevertheless I'll bet with you. Five to one it comes off to-night! Now! There goes your sister into the house; just go in after her."

Jim sauntered off, and Sam came and laid his great length down by the side of Halbert.

They talked on indifferent matters for a few minutes, till the latter said,—

"You are a lucky fellow, Sam."

"With regard to what?" said Sam.

"With regard to Miss Brentwood, I mean."

"What makes you think so?"

"Are you blind, Sam? Can't you see that she loves you better than any man in the world?"

He answered nothing, but turning his eyes upon Halbert, gazed at him a moment to see whether he was jesting or no. No, he was in earnest. So he looked down on the grass again, and, tearing little tufts up, said,—

"What earthly reason have you for thinking that?"

"What reason!—fifty thousand reasons. Can you see nothing in her eyes when she speaks to you, which is not there at other times; hey, Bat?—I can, if you can't."

"If I could think so!" said Sam. "If I could find out?"

"When I want to find out anything, I generally ask," said Halbert.

Sam gave him the full particulars of Cecil's defeat.

"All the better for you," said Halbert; "depend upon it. I don't know much about women, it is true, but I know more than you do."

"I wish I knew as much as you do," said Sam.

"And I wish I knew as little as you do," said Halbert.

Dinner-time came, but the Captain and the Doctor were not to the fore. After some speculations as to what had become of them, and having waited an hour, Jim said, that, in the unexplained absence of the crowned head, he

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felt it his duty to the country, to assume the reins of government, and order dinner. Prime Minister Alice, having entered a protest, offered no further opposition, and dinner was brought in.

Young folks don't make so much of dinner as old ones at any time, and this dinner was an unusually dull one. Sam was silent and thoughtful, and talked little ; Alice, too, was not quite herself. Jim, as usual, ate like a hero, but talked little ; so the conversation was principally carried on by Halbert, in the narrative style, who really made himself very useful and agreeable, and I am afraid they would have been a very " slow " party without him.

Soon after the serious business of eating was over, Jim said,—

" Alice, I wonder what the governor will say ? "

" About what, brother ? "

" About my going soldiering."

" Save us ! What new crotchet is this ? "

" Only that I'm going to bother the governor till he gets me a commission in the army."

" Are you really serious, Jim ? "

" I never was more so in my life."

" So, Mr. Halbert," said Alice, looking round at him, " you are only come to take my brother away from me ! "

" I assure you, Miss Brentwood, that I have only aided and abetted : the idea was his own."

" Well, well, I see how it is;—we were too happy, I suppose."

" But, Alice," said Jim, " won't you be proud to see your brother a good soldier ? "

" Proud ! I was always proud of you. But I wish the idea had never come into your head. If it was in war time I would say nothing, but now it is very different. Well, gentlemen, I shall leave you to your wine. Mr. Halbert, I like you very much, but I wish you hadn't turned Jim's head."

She left them, and walked down the garden ; through

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the twilight among the vines, which were dropping their yellow leaves lightly on the turf before the breath of the autumn evening. So Jim was going,—going to be killed probably, or only coming back after ten years' absence, “full of strange oaths and bearded like a pard!” She knew well how her father would jump at his first hint of being a soldier, and would move heaven and earth to get him a commission,—yes, he would go—her own darling, funny, handsome Jim, and she would be left all alone.

No, not quite! There is a step on the path behind her that she knows; there is an arm round her waist which was never there before, and yet she starts not as a low voice in her ear says,—

“Alice, my love, my darling, I have come after you to tell you that you are dearer to me than my life, and all the world besides. Can you love me half as well as I love you? Alice, will you be my wife?”

What answer? Her hands pressed to her face, with a flood of happy tears, she only says,—

“Oh! I'm so happy, Sam! So glad, so glad!”

Pipe up there, golden-voiced magpie; give us one song more before you go to roost. Laugh out, old jackass, till you fetch an echo back from the foggy hollow. Up on your bare boughs, it is dripping, dreary autumn: but down here in the vineyard are bursting the first green buds of an immortal spring.

There are some scenes which should only be undertaken by the hand of a master, and which, attempted by an apprentice like myself, would only end in disastrous failure, calling down the wrath of all honest men and true critics upon my devoted head,—not undeservedly. Three men in a century, or thereabouts, could write with sufficient delicacy and purity, to tell you what two such young lovers as Sam Buckley and Alice Brentwood said to one another in the garden that evening, walking up and down between the yellow vines. I am not one of those three. Where Charles Dickens has failed, I may be excused from

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being diffident. I am an old bachelor, too—a further excuse. But no one can prevent my guessing, and I guess accordingly,—that they talked in a very low tone, and when, after an hour, Alice said it was time to come in, that Sam was quite astonished to find how little had been said, and what very long pauses there had been.

They came in through the window into the sitting-room, and there was Dr. Mulhaus, Captain Brentwood, and also, of all people, Major Buckley, whom the other two had picked up in their ride and brought home. My information about this period of my history is very full and complete. It has come to my knowledge on the best authority, that when Sam came forward to the light, Halbert kicked Jim's shins under the table, and whispered, "You have lost your money, old fellow!" and that Jim answered, "I wish it was ten pounds instead of five."

But old folks are astonishingly obtuse. Neither of the three seniors saw what had happened; but entered *con amore* into the proposed expedition to Cape Chatham, and when bedtime came, Captain Brentwood, honest gentleman, went off to rest, and having said his prayers and wound up his watch, prepared for a comfortable night's rest, as if nothing was the matter.

He soon found his mistake. He had got his boots off, and was sitting pensively at his bedside, meditating further disrobements, when Jim entered myteriously, and quietly announced that his whole life in future would be a weary burden if he didn't get a commission in the army, or at least a cadetship in the East India Company's service. Him the Captain settled by telling, that if he didn't change his mind in a month he'd see about it, and so packed him off to bed. Secondly, as he was taking off his coat, wondering exceedingly at Jim's communication, Sam appeared, and humbly and respectfully informed him that he had that day proposed to his daughter and been accepted, —provisionally; hoping that the Captain would not disapprove of him as a son-in-law. He was also rapidly

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packed off to bed, by the assurance that he (Brentwood) had never felt so happy in his life, and had been sincerely hoping that the young folks would fall in love with one another for a year past.

So, Sam dismissed, the Captain got into bed; but as soon as the light was blown out two native cats began grunting under the washing-stand, and he had to get out, and expel them in his shirt; and finally he lost his temper and began swearing. "Is a man never to get to sleep?" said he. "The devil must be abroad to-night, if ever he was in his life."

No sleep that night for Captain Brentwood. His son, asking for a commission in the army, and his daughter going to be married! Both desirable enough in their way, but not the sort of facts to go to sleep over, particularly when fired off in his ear just as he was lying down. So he lay tossing about, more or less uncomfortable all night, but dozed off just as the daylight began to show more decidedly in the window. He appeared to have slept from thirty to thirty-five seconds, when Jim woke him with,—

"It's time to get up, father, if you are going to Cape Chatham to-day."

"D—n Cape Chatham," was his irreverent reply when Jim was gone, which sentiment has been often re-echoed by various coasting skippers in later times. "Why, I haven't been to sleep ten minutes,—and a frosty morning, too. I wish it would rain. I am not vindictive, but I do indeed. Can't the young fools go alone, I wonder? No; hang it, I'll make myself agreeable to-day, at all events!"

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Chapter VIII

How they all went hunting for Sea Anemones at Cape Chatham—and how the Doctor got a terrible Fright—and how Captain Blockstrop showed that there was good Reason for it

AND presently, the Captain, half dressed, working away at his hair with two very stiff brushes, betook himself to Major Buckley's room, whom he found shaving. "I'll wait till you're done," said he; "I don't want you to cut yourself."

And then he resumed: "Buckley, your son wants to marry my daughter."

"Shows his good taste," said the Major. "What do you think of it?"

"I am very much delighted," said the Captain.

"And what does she say to it?"

"She is very much delighted."

"And I am very much delighted, and I suppose Sam is too. So there we are, you see: all agreed."

And that was the way the marriage negotiations proceeded; indeed, it was nearly all that was ever said on the subject. But one day the Major brought two papers over to the Captain (who signed them), which were supposed to refer to settlements, and after that all the arrangements were left to Alice and Mrs. Buckley.

They started for Cape Chatham about nine o'clock in the day; Halbert and Jim first, then Sam and Alice, and lastly the three elders. This arrangement did not last long however; for very soon Sam and Alice called aloud to Halbert and Jim to come and ride with them, for that they were boring one another to death. This they did, and now the discreet and sober conversation of the oldsters was much disturbed by the loud laughter of the younger folks, in which, however, they could not help joining. It

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was a glorious crystal clear day in autumn ; all nature, aroused from her summer's rest, had put off her suit of hodden grey, and was flaunting in gaudiest green. The atmosphere was so amazingly pure, that miles away across the plains the travellers could distinguish the herds of turkeys (bustards) stalking to and fro, while before them, that noble maritime mountain Cape Chatham towered up, sharply defined above the gleaming haze which marked the distant sea.

For a time their way lay straight across the broad well-grassed plains, marked with ripples as though the retiring sea had but just left it. Then a green swamp ; through the tall reeds the native companion, king of cranes, waded majestic ; the brilliant porphyry water-hen, with scarlet bill and legs, flashed like a sapphire among the emerald green water-sedge. A shallow lake, dotted with wild ducks, here and there a group of wild swans, black with red bills, floating calmly on its bosom.—A long stretch of grass as smooth as a bowling-green.—A sudden rocky rise, clothed with native cypress (*Exocarpus*—Oh my botanical readers !), honeysuckle (*Banksia*), she-oak (*Casuarina*), and here and there a stunted gum. Cape Chatham began to show grander and nearer, topping all ; and soon they saw the broad belt of brown sandy heath that lay along the shore.

"Here," said the Doctor, riding up, "we leave the last limit of the lava streams from Mirngish and the Organ-hill. Immediately you shall see how we pass from the richly-grassed volcanic plains, into the barren sandstone heaths ; from a productive pasture land into a useless flower-garden. Nature here is economical, as she always is : she makes her choicest ornamental efforts on spots otherwise useless. You will see a greater variety of vegetation on one acre of your sandy heath than on two square miles of the thickly-grassed country we have been passing over."

It was as he said. They came soon on to the heath ;

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a dark dreary expanse, dull to look upon after so long a journey upon the bright green grass. It stretched away right and left interminably, only broken here and there with islands of dull-coloured trees ; as melancholy a piece of country as one could conceive : yet far more thickly peopled with animal, as well as vegetable life, than the rich pastoral downs further inland. Now they began to see the little red brush kangaroo, and the grey forester, skipping away in all directions ; and had it been summer they would have been startled more than once by the brown snake, and the copper snake, deadliest of their tribe. The painted quail, and the brush quail (the largest of Australian game birds, I believe), whirred away from beneath their horses' feet ; and the ground parrot, green, with mottlings of gold and black, rose like a partridge from the heather, and flew low. Here, too, the Doctor flushed a " White's thrush," close to an outlying belt of forest, and got into a great state of excitement about it. " The only known bird," he said, " which is found in Europe, America, and Australia alike." Then he pointed out the emu wren, a little tiny brown fellow, with long hairy tail-feathers, flitting from bush to bush ; and then, leaving ornithology, he called their attention to the wonderful variety of low vegetation that they were riding through ; Hakeas, Acacias, Grevilleas, and what not. In spring this brown heath would have been a brilliant mass of flowers ; but now, nothing was to be seen save a few tall crimson spikes of *Epacris*, and here and there a bunch of lemon-coloured *Correas*. Altogether, he kept them so well amused, that they were astonished to come so quickly upon the station, placed in a snug cove of the forest, where it bordered on the heath beside a sluggish creek. Then, seeing the mountain towering up close to them, and hearing, as they stayed at the door, a low continuous thunder behind a high roll in the heath which lay before them, they knew that the old ocean was close at hand, and that their journey was done.

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The people at the station were very glad to see them, of course. Barker, the paterfamilias, was an old friend of both the Major and the Captain, and they found so much to talk about, that after a heavy midday-meal, excellent in kind, though that kind was coarse, and certain libations of pale ale and cold claret and water, the older of the party, with the exception of Dr. Mulhaus, refused to go any farther; so the young people started forth to the Cape, under the guidance of George Barker, the fourth or fifth son, who happened to be at home.

"Doctor," said Alice, as they were starting, "do you remark what beautiful smooth grass covers the Cape itself, while here we have nothing but this scrubby heath? The mountain is, I suppose, some different formation?"

"Granite, my dear young lady," said the Doctor. "A cap of granite rising through and partly overlying this sandstone."

"You can always tell one exactly what one wants to know," said Alice; and, as they walked forwards, somehow got talking to Halbert, which I believe most firmly had been arranged beforehand with Sam. For he, falling back, ranged alongside of the Doctor, and, managing to draw him behind the others, turned to him and said suddenly,—

"My dear old friend! my good old tutor!"

The Doctor stopped short, pulled out a pair of spectacles, wiped them, put them on, and looked at Sam through them for nearly a minute, and then said:

"My dear boy, you don't mean to say——"

"I do Doctor.—Last night.—And, oh! if you could only tell how happy I am at this moment! If you could but guess at it!——"

"Pooh, pooh!" said the Doctor; "I am not so old as that, my dear boy. Why, I am a marrying man myself. Sam, I am so very, very glad! you have won her, and now wear her, like a pearl beyond all price. I think that she is worthy of you: more than that she could not be."

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They shook hands, and soon Sam was at her side again, toiling up the steep ascent. They soon distanced the others, and went forwards by themselves.

There was such a rise in the ground seawards, that the broad ocean was invisible till they were half way up the grassy down. Then right and left they began to see the nether firmament, stretching away infinitely. But the happy lovers paused not till they stood upon the loftiest breezy knoll, and seemed alone together between the blue cloudless heaven and another azure-sphere which lay beneath their feet.

A cloudless sky and a sailless sea. Far beneath them they heard but saw not the eternal surges gnawing at the mountain. A few white albatrosses skimmed and sailed below, and before, seaward, the sheets of turf, falling away, stretched into a shoreless headland, fringed with black rock and snow-white surf.

She stood there flushed and excited with the exercise, her bright hair dishevelled, waving in the free sea-breeze, the most beautiful object in that glorious landscape, her noble mate beside her. Awe, wonder, and admiration kept both of them silent for a few moments, and then she spoke.

"Do you know any of the choruses in the 'Messiah'?" asked she.

"No, I do not," said Sam.

"I am rather sorry for it," she said, "because this is so very like some of them."

"I can quite imagine that," said Sam. "I can quite imagine music which expresses what we see now. Something infinitely *broad* I should say. Is that nonsense now?"

"Not to me," said Alice.

"I imagined," said Sam, "that the sea would be much rougher than this. In spite of the ceaseless thunder below there, it is very calm."

"Calm, eh?" said the Doctor's voice behind them.

"God help the ship that should touch that reef this day, though a nautilus might float in safety! See how the groundswell is tearing away at those rocks; you can just distinguish the long heave of the water, before it breaks. There is the most dangerous groundswell in the world off this coast. Should this country ever have a large coast-trade, they will find it out, in calm weather with no anchorage."

A great coasting trade has arisen; and the Doctor's remark has proved terribly true. Let the Monumental City and the Schomberg, the Duncan Dunbar and the Catherine Adamson bear witness to it. Let the drowning cries of hundreds of good sailors, who have been missed and never more heard of, bear witness that this is the most pitiless and unprotected, and, even in calm weather, the most dangerous coast in the world.

But Jim came panting up, and throwing himself on the short turf, said—

"So this is the great Southern Ocean; eh! How far can one see, now, Halbert?"

"About thirty miles."

"And how far to India; eh?"

"About seven thousand."

"A long way," said Jim. "However, not so far as to England."

"Fancy," said Halbert, "one of those old Dutch voyagers driving on this unknown coast on a dark night. What a sudden end to their voyage! Yet that must have happened to many ships which have never come home. Perhaps when they come to explore this coast a little more they may find some old ship's ribs jammed on a reef; the ribs of some ship whose name and memory has perished."

"The very thing you mention is the case," said the Doctor. "Down the coast here, under a hopeless, black basaltic cliff, is to be seen the wreck of a very, very old ship, now covered with coral and seaweed. I waited down there for a spring tide, to examine her, but could deter-

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mine nothing, save that she was very old ; whether Dutch or Spanish I know not.* You English should never sneer at those two nations ; they were before you everywhere."

"And the Chinese before any of us in Australia," replied Halbert.

"If you will just come here," said Alice, "where those black rocks are hid by the bend of the hill, you get only three colours in your landscape ; blue sky, grey grass, and purple sea. But look, there is a man standing on the promontory. He makes quite an eye-sore there. I wish he would go away."

"I suppose he has as good a right there as any of us," answered the Doctor. "But he certainly does not harmonise very well with the rest of the colouring. What a strange place he has chosen to stand in, looking out over the sea, as though he were a shipwrecked mariner—the last of the crew."

"A shipwrecked mariner would hardly wear breeches and boots, my dear Doctor," said Jim. "That man is a stockman."

"Not one of ours, however," said George Barker ; "even at this distance I can see that. See, he's gone ! Strange ! I know of no way down the cliff thereabouts. Would you like to come down to the shore ?"

So they began their descent to the shore by a winding path of turf, among tumbled heaps of granite ; down towards the rock-walled cove ; a horseshoe of smooth white sand lying between two long black reefs, among whose isolated pinnacles the groundswell leapt and spouted ceaselessly.

Halbert remarked, "This granite coast is hardly so remarkable as our Cornish one. There are none of those queer pinnacles and tors one sees there, just ready to topple down into the sea. This granite is not half so fantastic."

*Such a ship may be seen in the eastern end of Portland Bay, near the modern town of Port Fairy.

"Earthquakes, of which you have none in Cornwall," said the Doctor, "will just account for the difference. I have felt one near here quite as strong as your famous lieutenant, who capsized the Logan stone."

But now, getting on the level sands, they fell to gathering shells and sea-weeds like children. Jim, trying to see how near he could get to a wave without being caught, got washed up like jetsam. Alice took Sam's pocket-handkerchief, and filled it indiscriminately with flotsam, and everything she could lay her hand on, principally, however, lagend. Trochuses, as big as one's fist, and "Venus-ears," scarlet outside. And after an hour, wet-footed and happy, dragging a yard or so of sea-tang behind her, she looked round for the Doctor, and saw him far out on the reef, lying flat on his stomach, and closely examining a large still pool of salt water, contained in the crevices of the rocks.

He held up his hand and beckoned. Sam and Alice advanced towards him over the slippery beds of sea-weed, Sam bravely burying his feet in the wet clefts, and holding out his hand to help her along. Once there was a break in the reef, too broad to be jumped, and then for the first time he had her fairly in his arms and swung her across, which was undoubtedly very delightful, but unfortunately soon over. At length, however, they reached the Doctor, who was seated like a cormorant on a wet rock, lighting a pipe.

"What have you collected?" he asked. "Show me."

Alice proudly displayed the inestimable treasures contained in Sam's handkerchief.

"Rubbish! Rubbish!" said the Doctor. "Do you believe in mermaidens?"

"Of course I do, if you wish it," said Alice. "Have you seen one?"

"No, but here is one of their flower-gardens. Bend down and look into this pool."

She bent and looked. The first thing that she saw was

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her own exquisite face, and Sam's brown phiz peering over her shoulder. A golden tress of hair loosened by the sea breeze, fell down into the water, and had to be looped up again. Then gazing down once more, she saw beneath the crystal water a bed of flowers; dahlias, ranunculuses, carnations, chrysanthemums, of every colour in the rainbow save blue. She gave a cry of pleasure: "What are they, Doctor? What do you call them?"

"Sea anemones, in English, I believe," said the Doctor, "actinias, serpulas, and sabellas. You may see something like that on the European coasts, on a small scale, but there is nothing I ever have seen like that great crimson fellow with cream-coloured tentacles. I do not know his name. I suspect he has never been described. The common European anemone they call '*crassicornis*' is something like him, but not half as fine."

"Is there any means of gathering and keeping them, Doctor?" asked Sam. "We have no flowers in the garden like them."

"No possible means," said the Doctor. "They are but lumps of jelly. Let us come away and get round the headland before the tide comes in."

They wandered on from cove to cove, under the dark cliffs, till rounding a little headland the Doctor called out,—

"Here is something in your Cornish style, Halbert."

A thin wall of granite, like a vast buttress, ran into the sea, pierced by a great arch, some sixty feet high. Aloft all sharp grey stone: below, wherever the salt water had reached, a mass of dark clinging weed: while beyond, as though set in a dark frame, was a soft glimpse of a blue sky and snow-white sea-birds.

"There is nothing so grand as that in Cornwall, Doctor," said Halbert.

"Can we pass under it, Mr. Barker?" said Alice. "I should like to go through; we have been into none of the caves yet."

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"Oh, yes!" said George Barker. "You may go through for the next two hours. The tide has not turned yet."

"I'll volunteer first," said the Doctor, "and if there's anything worth seeing beyond, I'll come for you."

It was, as I said, a thin wall of granite, which ran out from the rest of the hill, seaward, and was pierced by a tall arch; the blocks which had formerly filled the void now lay, weed-grown, half buried in sand, forming a slippery threshold. Over these the Doctor climbed and looked beyond.

A little sandy cove, reef-bound, like those they had seen before, lay under the dark cliffs; and on a water-washed rock, not a hundred yards from him, stood the man they had seen on the downs above, looking steadily seaward.

The Doctor slipped over the rocks like an otter, and approached the man across the smooth sand, unheard in the thunder of the surf. When he was close upon him, the stranger turned, and the Doctor uttered a low cry of wonder and alarm.

It was George Hawker! The Doctor knew him in a moment: but whether the recognition was mutual, he never found out, for Hawker, stepping rapidly from stone to stone, disappeared round the headland, and the thunder-struck Doctor retraced his steps to the arch.

There were all the young people gathered, wondering and delighted. But Alice came to meet him, and said,—

"Who was that with you just now?"

"A mermaid!" replied he.

"That, indeed!" said Alice. "And what did she say?"

"She said, 'Go home to your supper; you have seen quite enough; go home in good time.'"

"Doctor, there is something wrong!" said Alice. "I see it in your face. Can you trust me, and tell me what it is?"

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"I can trust you so far as to tell you that you are right. I don't like the look of things at all. I fear there are evil times coming for some of our friends! Further than this I can say nothing. Say your prayers, and trust God! Don't tell Sam anything about this: to-morrow I shall speak to him. We won't spoil a pleasant holiday on mere suspicion."

They rejoined the others, and the Doctor said, "Come away home now; we have seen enough. Some future time we will come here again: you might see this fifty times, and never get tired of it."

After a good scramble they stood once more on the down above, and turned to take a last look at the broad blue sea before they descended inland; at the first glance seaward, Halbert exclaimed,—

"See there, Doctor! see there! A boat!"

"It's only a whale, I think," said George Barker.

There was a black speck far out at sea, but no whale; it was too steady for that. All day the air had been calm; if anything, the breeze was from the north, but now a strong wind was coming up from the south-east, freshening every moment, and bringing with it a pent bank of dark clouds; and, as they watched, the mysterious black speck was topped with white, and soon they saw that it was indeed a boat driving before the wind under a sprit-sail, which had just been set.

"That is very strange!" said George Barker. "Can it be a shipwrecked party?"

"More likely a mob of escaped convicts from Van Diemen's Land," said Jim. "If so, look out for squalls, you George, and keep your guns loaded."

"I don't think it can be that, Jim," said Sam. "What could bring them so far north? They would have landed, more likely, somewhere in the Straits, about the big lakes."

"They may have been driven off shore by these westerly winds which have been blowing the last few days," re-

plied Jim, "and kept their boat's head northward, to get nearer the settlements. They will be terribly hungry when they do land, for certain. What's your opinion, Doctor?"

"I think that wise men should be always prepared. We should communicate with Captain Desborough, and set the police on the alert."

"I wonder," said Sam, "if that mysterious man we saw to-day, watching on the cliff, could have had any connexion with this equally mysterious boat. Not likely, though. However, if they are going to land to-night, they had better look sharp, for it is coming on to blow."

The great bank of cloud which they had been watching, away to the south-east, was growing and spreading rapidly, sending out little black avant-couriers of scud, which were hurrying fanlike across the heavens, telling the news of the coming storm. Landward, in the west, the sun was going down in purple and scarlet splendour, but seaward, all looked dark and ominous.

The young folks stood together in the veranda before they went in to dinner, listening to the wind which was beginning to scream angrily round the corners of the house. The rain had not yet gathered strength to fall steadily, but was whisked hither and thither by the blast, in a few uncertain drops. They saw that a great gale was coming up, and knew that, in a few hours, earth and sky would be mingled in furious war.

"How comfortable it is to think that all the animals are under shelter to-night!" said Sam. "Jim, my boy, I am glad you and I are not camped out with cattle this evening. We have been out on nights as bad as this though; eh? Oh, Lord! fancy sitting the saddle all to-night, under the breaking boughs, wet through!"

"No more of that for me, old Sam. No more jolly gallops after cattle or horses for me. But I was always a good hand at anything of that sort, and I mean to be a good soldier now. You'll see."

At dark, while they were sitting at dinner, the storm

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was raging round the house in full fury ; but there, in the well-lighted room, before a good fire, they cared little for it. When dinner was over, the Doctor called the Captain and the Major aside, and told them in what manner he had seen and recognised George Hawker on the beach that day ; and raised their fears still more by telling them of that mysterious boat which the Doctor thought Hawker had been watching for. None of them could understand it, but all agreed that these things boded no good ; and so, having called their host into their confidence, with regard to the boat, they quietly loaded all the fire-arms in the place, and put them together in the hall. This done, they returned to the sitting-room, and, having taken their grog, retired to bed.

It must be remembered that hitherto Major Buckley knew nothing of George Hawker's previous appearance, but the Doctor now let him into the secret. The Major's astonishment and wrath may be conceived, at finding that his old *protégée* Mary, instead of being a comfortable widow, was the persecuted wife of one of the greatest bushrangers known. At first he was stunned and confused, but, ere he slept, his clear straightforward mind had come to a determination that the first evil was the worst, and that, God give him grace, he would hand the scoundrel over to justice on the first opportunity, sure that he was serving Mary best by doing so.

That night Jim and Sam lay together in a little room to the windward of the house. They were soon fast asleep, but, in the middle of the night, Jim was awoke by a shake on the shoulder, and, rousing himself, saw that Sam was sitting up in the bed.

"My God, Jim!" said he,— "I have had such an awful dream! I dreamed that those fellows in the boat were carrying off Alice, and I stood by and saw it, and could not move hand or foot. I am terribly frightened. That was something more than a dream, Jim."

"You ate too much of that pie at dinner," said Jim,

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"and you've had the nightmare,—that's what is the matter with you. Lord bless you, I often have the nightmare when I have eaten too much at supper, and lie on my back. Why, I dreamed the other night that the devil had got me under the wool-press, screwing me down as hard as he could, and singing the Hundredth Psalm all the time. That was a much worse dream than yours."

Sam was obliged to confess that it was. "But still," said he, "I think mine was something more than a dream. I'm frightened still."

"Oh, nonsense; lie down again. You are pulling all the clothes off me."

They lay down, and Jim was soon asleep, but not so Sam. His dream had taken such hold of his imagination, that he lay awake, listening to the storm howling around the house. Now and then he could hear the unearthly scream of some curlew piercing the din, and, above all, he could hear the continuous earth-shaking thunder of the surf upon the beach. Soon after daylight, getting Halbert to accompany him, he went out to have a look at the shore, and, forcing their way against the driving, cutting rain, they looked over the low cliff at the furious waste of waters beneath them, and saw mountain after mountain of water hurl itself, in a cloud of spray, upon the shore.

"What terrible waves, now!" said Sam.

"Yes," replied Halbert; "there's no land to windward for six thousand miles or more. I never saw heavier seas than those. I enjoy this, Sam. It reminds me of a good roaring winter's day in old Cornwall."

"I like it, too," said Sam. "It freshens you up. How calm the water is to the leeward of the Cape!"

"Yes; a capital harbour of refuge that. Let us go home to breakfast."

He turned to go, but was recalled by a wild shout from Sam.

"A ship! A ship!"

He ran back and looked over into the seething hell of

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waters below. Was it only a thicker spot in the driving mist, or was it really a ship? If so, God help her.

Small time to deliberate. Ere he could think twice about it, a full-rigged ship, about five hundred tons, with a close-reefed topsail, and a rag of a foresail upon her, came rushing, rolling, diving, and plunging on, apparently heading for the deadly white line of breakers which stretched into the sea at the end of the promontory.

"A Queen's ship, Sam! a Queen's ship! The Tartar, for a thousand pounds! Oh, what a pity; what a terrible pity!"

"Only a merchant ship, surely," said Sam.

"Did you ever see a merchant ship with six such guns as those on her upper deck, and a hundred blue-jackets at quarters? That is the Tartar, Sam, and in three minutes there will be no Tartar."

They had run in their excitement out to the very end of the Cape, and now the ship was almost under their feet, an awful sight to see. She was rolling fearfully, going dead before the wind. Now and then she would slop tons of water on her deck, and her mainyard would almost touch the water. But still the dark clusters of men along her bulwarks held steadfast, and the ship's head never veered half a point. Now it became apparent that she would clear the reef by a hundred yards or more, and Halbert, waving his hat, cried out,—

"Well done, Blockstrop! Bravely done, indeed! He is running under the lee of the Cape for shelter. Her Majesty has one more ship-of-war than I thought she would have had, five minutes ago."

As he spoke, she had passed the reef. The yards, as if by magic, swung round, and, for a moment, she was broadside on to the sea. One wave broke over her, and nought but her masts appeared above a sheet of white foam; but, ere the water had well done pouring from her open deck ports, she was in smooth water, her anchor was down, and the topsail yard was black with men.

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"Let us come down, Sam," said Halbert: "very likely they will send a boat ashore."

As they were scrambling down the leeward side of the cliff, they saw a boat put off from the ship, and gained the beach in time to meet a midshipman coming towards them. He, seeing two well-dressed gentlemen before him, bowed, and said,—

"Good morning; very rough weather."

"Very, indeed," said Halbert. "Is that the Tartar, pray?"

"That is the Tartar; yes. We were caught in the gale last night, and we lay-to. This morning, as soon as we recognised the Cape, we determined to run for this cove, where we have been before. We had an anxious night last night, I assure you. We have been terribly lucky. If the wind had veered a few more points to the east, we should have been done for. We never could have beaten off in such a sea as this."

"Are you going to Sydney?"

"No; we are in chase of a boat full of escaped convicts from Launceston. Cunning dogs; they would not land in the Straits. We missed them and got across to Port Phillip, and put Captain D—— and his black police on the alert; and the convicts have got a scent of it, and coasted up north. We have examined the coast all along, but I am afraid they have given us the slip; there is such a system of intelligence among them. However, if they had not landed before last night, they have saved us all trouble; and if they are ashore we wash our hands of them, and leave them to the police."

Halbert and Sam looked at one another. Then the former said,—

"Last night, about an hour before it came on to blow, we saw a boat making for this very headland, which puzzled us exceedingly; and, what was stranger still, we saw a man on the Cape, who seemed to be on the lookout."

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“That is quite possible,” replied the midshipman; “these fellows have a queer system of communication. The boat you saw must certainly have been them; and if they landed at all they must have landed here.”

* * * * *

I must change the scene here, if you please, my dear readers, and get you to come with me on board his (I beg pardon, her) Majesty's ship *Tartar*, for a few minutes, for on the quarter-deck of that noble sloop there are at this moment two men worth rescuing from oblivion.

The first is a stoutish, upright, middle-aged man, in a naval uniform, with a brickdust complexion, and very light scanty whiskers; the jolliest, cheeriest-looking fellow you are likely to meet in a year's journey. Such a bright merry blue eye as he has, too! This is Captain Blockstrop, now, I am happy to say, C.B.; a right valiant officer, as the despatches of Lyons and Peel will testify.

The other is a very different sort of man;—a long, wiry, brown-faced man, with a big forehead, and a comical expression about his eyes. This is no less a person than the Colonial Secretary of one of our three great colonies: of which I decline to mention. Those who know the Honourable Abiram Pollifex do not need to be told; and those who do not must find out for themselves. I may mention that he has been known to retain office seven years in succession, and yet he seldom threatens to resign his office and throw himself upon the country fewer than three times and sometimes four, per annum. Latterly, I am sorry to say, a miserable faction, taking advantage of one of his numerous resignations, have assumed the reins of government, and, in spite of three votes of want of confidence, persist in retaining the seals of office. Let me add to this, that he is considered the best hand at quiet “chaff” in the House, and is allowed, both by his supporters and opponents, to be an honourable man, and a right good fellow.

Such were the two men who now stood side by side on

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the quarter-deck, looking eagerly at Sam and Halbert through a pair of telescopes.

"Pollifex," said the Captain, "what do you make of these?"

"Gentlemen," said the Secretary, curtly.

"So I make out," said the Captain: "and apparently in good condition, too. A very well-fed man that biggest, I should say."

"Ye-es; well, ye-es," said the Secretary; "he does look well-fed enough. He must be a stranger to these parts; probably from the Maneroo * plains, or thereabout."

"What makes you think so?"

"Dear me," said the Secretary; "have you been stationed nearly three years on this coast, and ask how a man could possibly be in good condition living in those scrubby heaths?"

"Bad-looking country; eh?" said the Captain.

"Small cattle-stations, sir," said the Secretary, "I can see at a glance. Salt beef, very tough, and very little of it. I shall run a bill through the House for the abolition of small cattle-stations next session."

"Better get your estimates through first, old fellow. The bag-pipes will play quite loud enough over them to last for some time."

"I know it, but tremble not," replied the undaunted Secretary; "I have got used to it. I fancy I hear Callaghan beginning now: 'The unbridled prodigality, sir, and the reckless profligacy, sir, of those individuals who have so long, under the name of government——'"

"That'll do, now," said the Captain; "you are worse than the reality. I shall go ashore, and take my chance of getting breakfast. Will you come?"

"Not if I know it, sir, with pork chops for breakfast in the cabin. Blockstrop, have you duly reflected what you are about to do? You are about to land alone, unarmed, unprovisioned, among the offscourings of white society,

* "Maneroo" is always pronounced "Maneera,"

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scarcely superior in their habits of life to the nomadic savages they have unjustly displaced. Pause and reflect, my dear fellow. What guarantee have you that they will not propose to feed you on damper, or some other nameless abomination of the same sort?"

"It was only the other day in the House," said the Captain, "that you said the small squatters and freehold farmers represented the greater part of the intelligence and education of the colony, and now——"

"Sir! sir!" said the Secretary, "you don't know what you are talking about. Sir, we are not in the House now. Are you determined, then?"

The Captain was quite determined, and they went down to the waist. They were raising a bag of potatoes from somewhere, and the Colonial Secretary, seizing two handfuls of them, presented them to the Captain.

"If you will go," he said, "take these with you, and teach the poor benighted white savages to plant them. So if you fall a victim to indigestion, we will vote a monument to you on the summit of the Cape, and write:— 'He did not live in vain. He introduced the potato among the small cattle-stations around Cape Chatham.'"

He held out his potatoes towards the retiring Captain with the air of Burke producing the dagger. His humour, I perceive, reads poor enough when written down, but when assisted by his comical impassible face, and solemn drawling delivery, I never heard anything much better.

Good old Pollifex! my heart warms towards him now. When I think what the men were whose clamour put him out of office in 184—, I have the conviction forced upon me, that the best among them was not worth his little finger. He left the colony in a most prosperous state, and, retiring honourably to one of his stations, set to work, as he said, to begin life again on a new principle. He is wealthy, honoured, and happy, as he deserves to be.

I cannot help, although somewhat in the wrong place,

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telling the reader under what circumstances I saw him last. Only two years ago, fifteen after he had left office, I happened to be standing with him, at the door of a certain club, in a certain capital, just after lunch time, when we saw the then Colonial Secretary, the man who had succeeded Pollifex, come scurrying round the corner of the street, fresh from his office. His face was flushed and perspiring, his hat was on wrong-side before, with his veil hanging down his back. In the one hand he held papers, in the other he supported over his fevered brow his white cotton umbrella; altogether he looked harassed beyond the bounds of human endurance, but when he caught sight of the open club-doors, he freshened a bit, and mended his pace. His troubles were not over, for ere he reached his haven, two Irishmen, with two different requests, rose as if from the earth, and confronted him. We saw him make two promises, contradictory to each other, and impossible of fulfilment, and as he came up the steps, I looked into the face of Ex-Secretary Pollifex, and saw there an expression which is beyond description. Say that of the ghost of a man who has been hanged, attending an execution. Or say the expression of a Catholic, converted by torture, watching the action of the thumb-screws upon another heretic. The air, in short, of a man who had been through it all before. And as the then Secretary came madly rushing up the steps, Pollifex confronted him, and said,—

“Don’t you wish you were me, T——?”

“Sir!” said the Secretary, “dipping” his umbrella and dropping his papers, for the purpose of rhetorically pointing with his left hand at nothing; “Sir! flesh and blood can’t stand it. I resign to-morrow.” And so he went in to his lunch, and is in office at this present moment.

I must apologise most heartily for this long digression. The Captain’s gig, impelled by the “might of England’s pride,” was cleverly beached alongside of the other boat, and the Captain stepped out and confronted the midshipman.

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“Got any news, Mr. Vang?”

“Yes, sir,” said the midshipman. “These gentlemen saw the boat yesterday afternoon.”

Sam and Halbert, who were standing behind him, came forward. The Captain bowed, and looked with admiration at the two highbred-looking men, that this unpromising desert had produced. They told him what they had told the midshipman, and the Captain said,—“It will be a very serious thing for this country side, if these dogs have succeeded in landing. Let us hope that the sea has done good service in swallowing fourteen of the vilest wretches that ever disgraced humanity. Pray, are either of you gentlemen magistrates?”

“My father, Major Buckley, is a magistrate,” said Sam. “The gentleman is Lieutenant Halbert, of the Bengal Artillery.”

The Captain bowed to Halbert, and turning to Sam, said,—“So you are the son of my old friend Major Buckley! I was midshipman in the ‘Phlegethon’ when she took him and part of his regiment to Portugal, in 1811. I met him at dinner in Sydney, the other day. Is he in the neighbourhood?”

“He is waiting breakfast for us not a quarter of a mile off,” said Sam. “Will you join us?”

“I shall be delighted; but duty first. If these fellows have succeeded in landing, you will have to arm and prepare for the worst. Now, unless they were caught by the gale and drowned, which I believe to be the case, they must have come ashore in this very bay, about five o’clock last night. There is no other place where they could have beached their boat for many miles. Consequently, the thing lies in a nutshell: if we find the boat, prepare yourselves,—if not, make yourselves easy. Let us use our wits a little. They would round the headland as soon as possible, and probably run ashore in that furthest cove to our right, just inside the reef. I have examined the bay through a telescope, and could make out nothing of her.

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Let us come and examine carefully. Downhaul!" (to his Cockswain). "Come with me."

They passed three or four indentations in the bay, examining as they went, finding nothing, but when they scrambled over the rocks which bounded the cove the Captain had indicated, he waved his hat, and laughing said,—

"Ha, ha! just as I thought. There she is."

"Where, Captain Blockstrop?" said Halbert. "I don't see her."

"Nor I either," said the Captain. "But I see the heap of seaweed that the cunning dogs have raked over her. Downhaul, heave away at this weed, and show these gentlemen what is below it."

The Cockswain began throwing away a pile of sea-tang heaped against a rock. Bit by bit was disclosed the clear run of a beautiful white whale boat, which when turned over discovered her oars laid neatly side by side, with a small spritsail. The Captain stood by with the air of a man who had made a hit, while Sam and Halbert stared at one another with looks of blank discomfiture and alarm.

Chapter IX

A Council of War

"THIS is a very serious matter for us, Captain Blockstrop," said Sam, as they were walking back to the boats. "An exceedingly serious matter."

"I have only one advice to give you, Mr. Buckley," said the Captain; "which is unnecessary, as it is just what your father will do. Fight, sir!—hunt 'em down. Shoot 'em! they will give you no quarter: be sure you don't give them any."

A wild discordant bellow was here heard from the ship, on which the Captain slapped his leg and said,—

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"Dash my buttons, if he hasn't got hold of my speaking-trumpet."

The midshipman came up with a solemn face, and, touching his cap, "reported,"—

"Colonial Secretary hailing, sir."

"Bless my soul, Mr. Vang, I can hear that," said the Captain. "I don't suppose any of my officers would dare to make such an inarticulate, no sailor-like bellow as that on her Majesty's quarter-deck. Can you make out what he says? That would be more to the purpose."

Again the unearthly bellow came floating over the water, happily deadened by the wind, which was roaring a thousand feet over head.

"Can you make out anything, Mr. Vang?" said the Captain.

"I make out 'pork chops!' sir," said the midshipman.

"Take one of the boats on board, Mr. Vang. My compliments, and will be much obliged if he will come ashore immediately! on important business, say. Tell him the convicts have landed, will you? Also, tell the lieutenant of the watch that I want either Mr. Tacks, or Mr. Sheets: either will do."

The boat was soon seen coming back with the Colonial Secretary in a statesmanlike attitude in the stern sheets, and beside him that important officer Mr. Tacks, a wee little dot of a naval cadet, apparently about ten years old.

"What were you bellowing about pork chops, Polli-fex?" asked the Captain, the moment the boat touched the shore.

"A failure, sir," said the Colonial Secretary; "burnt, sir; disgracefully burnt up to a cinder, sir. I have been consulting the honourable member for the Crossjack-yard (I allude to Mr. Tacks, N.C., my honourable friend, if he will allow me to call him so) as to the propriety of calling a court-martial on the cook's mate. He informs me that such a course is not usual in naval jurisprudence. I am,

however, of opinion that in one of the civil courts of the colony an action for damages would lie. Surely I have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Buckley of Baroona ? ”

Sam and he had met before, and the Secretary, finding himself on shore, and where he was known, dropped his King Cambyzes’ vein, and appeared in his real character of a shrewd, experienced man. They walked up together, and when they arrived at the summit of the ridge, and saw the magnificent plains stretching away inland, beyond the narrow belt of heath along the shore, the Secretary whispered to the Captain,—

“ I have been deceived. We shall get some breakfast, after all. As fine a country as I ever saw in my life ! ”

The party who were just sitting down to breakfast at the station were sufficiently astonished to see Captain Blockstrop come rolling up the garden walk, with that small ship-of-war Tacks sailing in his wake, convoying the three civilians ; but on going in and explaining matters, and room having been made for them at the table, Sam was also astonished on looking round to see that a new arrival had taken place since that morning.

It was that of a handsome singular-looking man. His hair was light, his whiskers a little darker, and his blonde moustache curled up towards his eyes like corkscrews or ram’s horns (congratulate me on my simile). A very merry laughing eye he had, too, blue of course, with that coloured hair ; altogether a very pleasant-looking man, and yet whose face gave one the idea that it was not at all times pleasant, but on occasions might look terribly tigerish and fierce. A man who won you at once, and yet one with whom one would hardly like to quarrel. Add to this, also, that when he opened his mouth to speak, he disclosed a splendid set of white teeth, and the moment he’d uttered a word, a stranger would remark to himself, “ That is an Irishman.”

Sam, who had ensconced himself beside Alice, looked up the long table towards him with astonishment. “ Why,

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good gracious, Captain Desborough," he said, "can that be you?"

"I have been waiting," said Desborough, "with the greatest patience, to see how long you would have the audacity to ignore my presence. How do you do, my small child? Sam, my dear, if ever I get cashiered for being too handsome to remain in the Service, I'll carry you about and exhibit you, as the biggest and ugliest boy in the Australian colonies."

Captain Desborough has been mentioned before in these pages. He was an officer in the army, at the present time holding the situation of Inspector of Police in this district. He was a very famous hunter-down of bushrangers, and was heartily popular with every one he was thrown against, except the aforesaid bushrangers. Sam and he were very old friends, and were very fond of one another.

Desborough was sitting now at the upper end of the table, with the Colonial Secretary, Major Buckley, Captain Blockstrop, Captain Brentwood, and Dr. Mulhaus. They looked very serious indeed.

"It was a very lucky thing, Desborough," said the Major, "that you happened to meet Captain Blockstrop. He has now, you perceive, handed over the care of these rascals to you. It is rather strange that they should have landed here."

"I believe that they were expected," said the Doctor. "I believe that there is a desperate scheme of villany afloat, and that some of us are the objects of it."

"If you mean," said Desborough, "that that man you saw on the Cape last night was watching for the boat, I don't believe it possible. It was, possibly, some stockman or shepherd, having a look at the weather."

The Doctor had it on the tip of his tongue to speak, and astound them by disclosing that the lonely watcher was none other than the ruffian Touan, alias George Hawker; but the Major pressed his foot beneath the table, and he was silent.

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"Well," said Desborough, "and that's about all that's to be said at present, except that the settlers must arm and watch, and if necessary fight."

"If they will only do that," said the Colonial Secretary; "if they will only act boldly in protecting their property and lives, the evil is reduced by one-half; but when Brallagan was out, nothing that I or the Governor could do would induce the majority of them to behave like men."

"Look here, now," said Barker, the host, "I was over the water when Brallagan was out, and when Howe was out too. And what could a lonely squatter do against half-a-dozen of 'em? Answer me that!"

"I don't mean that," said the Colonial Secretary; "what I refer to is the cowardly way in which the settlers allowed themselves to be prevented by threats from giving information. I speak the more boldly, Mr. Barker, because you were not one of those who did so."

Barker was appeased. "There's five long guns in my hall, and there's five long lads can use 'em," he said. "By-the-bye, Captain Desborough, let me congratulate you on the short work you made with that gang to the north, the other day. I am sorry to hear that the principal rascal of the lot, Captain Touan, gave you the slip."

The Doctor had been pondering, and had made up his mind to a certain course; he bent over the table, and said,—

"I think, on the whole, that it is better to let you all know the worst. That man whom we saw on the cliff last night I met afterwards, alone, down on the shore, and that man is no other than the one you speak of, Captain Touan."

Any one watching Desborough's face as the Doctor spoke would have seen his eyebrows contract heavily, and a fierce scowl settle on his face. The name the Doctor mentioned was a very unwelcome one. He had been taunted and laughed at, at Government-house, for having allowed Hawker to outwit him. His hot Irish blood couldn't stand that, and he had vowed to have the fellow

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somehow. Here he had missed him, again, and by so little, too! He renewed his vow to himself, and in an instant the cloud was gone, and the merry Irishman was there again.

"My dear Doctor," he said, "I am aware that you never speak at random, or I should ask you, were you sure of the man? Are you not mistaken?"

"Mistaken in *him*,—eh?" said the Doctor. "No, I was not mistaken."

"You seem to know too much of a very suspicious character, Doctor!" said Desborough. "I shall have to keep my eye on you, I see!"

* * * * *

Meanwhile, at the other end of the table, more agreeable subjects were being talked of. There sat our young coterie, laughing loudly, grouping themselves round some exceedingly minute object, which apparently was between Sam and Alice, and which, on close examination, turned out to be little Tacks, who was evidently making himself agreeable in a way hardly to be expected in one of his tender years. And this is the way he got there:—

When Captain Blockstrop came in, Alice was duly impressed by the appearance of that warrior. But when she saw little Tacks slip in behind him, and sit meekly down by the door; and when she saw how his character was appreciated by the cattle-dogs, one of whom had his head in the lad's lap, while the other was licking his face—when she saw, I say, the little blue and gold apparition, her heart grew pitiful, and, turning to Halbert, she said,—

"Why, good gracious me! You don't mean to tell me that they take such a child as that to sea; do you?"

"Oh dear, yes!" said Halbert, "and younger, too. Don't you remember the story about Collingwood offering his cake to the first lieutenant? He became, remember, a greater man than Nelson, in all except worldly honour."

"Would you ask him to come and sit by me, if you please?" said Alice.

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So Halbert went and fetched him in, and he sat and had his breakfast between Alice and Sam. They were all delighted with him ; such a child, and yet so bold and self-helpful, making himself quietly at home, and answering such questions as were put to him modestly and well. Would that all midshipmen were like him !

But it became time to go on board, and Captain Blockstrop, coming by where Alice sat, said, laughing,—

“ I hope you are not giving my officer too much marmalade, Miss Brentwood ? He is over-young to be trusted with a jam-pot,—eh, Tacks ? ”

“ Too young to go to sea, I should say,” said Alice.

“ Not too young to be a brave-hearted boy, however ! ” said the Captain. “ The other day, in Sydney harbour, one of my marines who couldn’t swim went overboard and this boy soused in after him, and carried the life-buoy to him, in spite of sharks. What do you think of that for a ten-year-old ? ”

The boy’s face flushed scarlet as the Captain passed on, and he held out his hand to Alice to say good-bye. She took it, looked at him, hesitated, and then bent down and kissed his cheek—a tender, sisterly kiss—something, as Jim said, to carry on board with him !

Poor little Tacks ! He was a great friend of mine ; so I have been tempted to dwell on him. He came to me with letters of introduction, and stayed at my place six weeks or more. He served brilliantly, and rose rapidly, and last year only I heard that Lieutenant Tacks had fallen in the dust, and never risen again, just at the moment that the gates of Delhi were burst down, and our fellows went swarming in to vengeance.

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Chapter X

An Earthquake, a Colliery Explosion, and an Adventure

So the Captain, the Colonial Secretary, and the small midshipman left the station and went on board again, disappearing from this history for evermore. The others all went home and grew warlike, arming themselves against the threatened danger; but still weeks, nay months, rolled on, and winter was turning into spring, and yet the country side remained so profoundly tranquil that every one began to believe that the convicts must after all have been drowned, and that the boat found by sagacious Blockstrop had been capsized and thrown bottom upwards on the beach. So that, before the brown flocks began to be spotted with white lambs, all alarm had gone by.

Only four persons, besides Mary Hawker herself, were conversant of the fact that the Bushranger and George Hawker were the same man. Of these only three, the Doctor, Major Buckley, and Captain Brentwood, knew of his more recent appearance on the shore, and they, after due consultation, took honest Tom Troubridge into their confidence.

But, as I said, all things went so quietly for two months, that at the end of that time no one thought any more of bushrangers than they would of tigers. And just about this time, I, Geoffry Hamlyn, having finished my last consignment of novels from England, and having nothing to do, determined to ride over, and spend a day or two with Major Buckley.

But when I rode up to the door at Baroona, having pulled my shirt collar up, and rapped at the door with my whip, out came the housekeeper to inform me there was not a soul at home. This was deeply provoking, for I had got on a new pair of riding trousers, which had cost money, and a new white hat with a blue net veil

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(rather a neat thing too), and I had ridden up to the house under the idea that fourteen or fifteen persons were looking at me out of window. I had also tickled my old horse, Chanticleer, to make him caper and show the excellency of my seat. But when I came to remember that the old horse had nearly bucked me over his head instead of capering, and to find that my hat was garnished with a large cobweb of what is called by courtesy native silk, with half-a-dozen dead leaves sticking in it, I felt consoled that no one had seen me approach, and asked the house-keeper with tolerable equanimity where they were all gone.

They were all gone, she said, over to Captain Brentwood's, and goodness gracious knew when they would be back again. Mrs. Hawker and Mr. Charles were gone with them. For her part, she should not be sorry when Mr. Sam brought Miss Brentwood over for good and all. The house was terrible lonesome when they were all away.

I remarked, "Oho!" and asked whether she knew if Mr. Troubridge was at Toonarbin.

No, she said; he was away again at Port Phillip with store cattle; making a deal of money, she understood, and laying out a deal for the Major in land. She wished he would marry Mrs. Hawker and settle down, for he was a pleasant gentleman, and fine company in a house. Wouldn't I get off and have a bit of cold wild duck and a glass of sherry?

Certainly I would. So I gave my horse to the groom and went in. I had hardly cut the first rich red slice from the breast of a fat teal, when I heard a light step in the passage, and in walked my man Dick. You remember him, reader. The man we saw five and twenty years ago on Dartmoor, combining with William Lee to urge the unhappy George Hawker on to ruin and forgery, which circumstance, remember, I knew nothing of at this time. The same man I had picked up footsore and penni-

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less in the bush sixteen years ago, and who had since lived with me, a most excellent and clever servant—the best I ever had. This man now came into Major Buckley's parlour, hat in hand, looking a little foolish, and when I saw him my knife and fork were paralysed with astonishment.

"Why, what the Dickens" (I used that strong expression) "brings you here, my lad?"

"I went to Hipsley's about the colt," he said, "and when I got home I found you were gone off unexpectedly; so I thought it better to come after you and tell you all about it. He won't take less than thirty-five."

"Man! man!" I said, "do you mean to say that you have ridden fifty miles to tell me the price of a leggy beast like that, after I had told you that twenty-four was my highest offer?"

He looked very silly, and I saw very well he had some other reason for coming than that. But with a good servant I never ask too many questions, and when I went out a short time after, and found him leaning against a fence, and talking earnestly to our old acquaintance William Lee, I thought, "He wanted an excuse to come up and see his old friend Lee. That is quite just and proper, and fully accounts for it."

Lee always paid me the high compliment of touching his hat to me, for old Devon' sake I suppose. "How's all at Toonarbin, Lee?" I asked.

"Well and hearty, sir. How is yourself, sir?"

"Getting older, Lee. Nothing worse than that. Dick, I am going on to Captain Brentwood's. If you like to go back to Toonarbin and stay a day or two with Lee, you can do so."

"I would rather come on with you, sir," he said eagerly.

"Are you sure?" I said.

"Quite sure, sir." And Lee said, "You go on with Mr. Hamlyn, Dick, and do your duty, mind."

I thought this odd; but knowing it useless to ask ques-

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tions of an old hand, or try to get any information which was not volunteered, I held my tongue and departed, taking Dick with me.

I arrived at Captain Brentwood's about three o'clock in the afternoon. I flatter myself that I made a very successful approach, and created rather a sensation among the fourteen or fifteen people who were sitting on the veranda. They took me for a distinguished stranger. But when they saw who it was they all began calling out to me at once to know how I was, and to come in (as if I wasn't coming in), and when at last I got among them, I nearly had my hand shaken off ; and the Doctor, putting on his spectacles and looking at me for a minute, asked what I had given for my hat ?

Let me see, who was there that day ? There was Mary Hawker, looking rather older, and a little worn ; and there was her son Charles sitting beside pretty Ellen Mayford, and carrying on a terrible flirtation with that young lady, in spite of her fat jolly-looking mother, who sat with folded hands beside her. Next to her sat her handsome brother Cecil, looking, poor lad ! as miserable as he well could look, although I did not know the cause. Then came Sam, beside his mother, whose noble happy face was still worth riding fifty miles to see ; and then, standing beside her chair, was Alice Brentwood.

I had never seen this exquisite creature before, and I immediately fell desperately and hopelessly in love with her, and told her so that same evening, in the presence of Sam. Finding that my affection was not likely to be returned, I enrolled myself as one of her knights, and remain so to this present time.

The Major sat beside his wife, and the Doctor and Captain Brentwood walked up and down, talking politics. There were also present, certain Hawbucks, leggy youths with brown faces and limp hair, in appearance and dress not unlike English steeplechase-riders who had been treated, on the face and hands, with walnut-juice. They

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never spoke, and the number of them then present I am uncertain about, but one of them I recollect could spit a good deal farther than any of his brothers, and proved it beyond controversy about twice in every three minutes.

I missed my old friend Jim Brentwood, and was informed that he had gone to Sydney, "on the spree," as Sam expressed it, along with a certain Lieutenant Halbert, who was staying on a visit with Major Buckley.

First I sat down by Mary Hawker, and had a long talk with her about old times. She was in one of her gay moods, and laughed and joked continuously. Then I moved up by invitation, to a chair between the Major and his wife, and had a long private and confidential conversation with them.

"How," I began, "is Tom Troubridge?"

"Tom is perfectly well," said the Major. "He still carries on his old chronic flirtation with Mary; and she is as ready to be flirted with as ever."

"Why don't they marry?" I asked, peevishly. "Why on earth don't they marry one another? What is the good of carrying on that old folly so long? They surely must have made up their minds by now. She knows she is a widow, and has known it for years."

"Good God! Hamlyn, are you so ignorant?" said the Major. And then he struck me dumb by telling me of all that had happened latterly: of George Hawker's reappearance, of his identity with the great bushranger, and, lastly, of his second appearance, not two months before.

"I tell you this in strict confidence, Hamlyn, as one of my oldest and best friends. I know how deeply your happiness is affected by all this."

I remained silent and thunderstruck for a time, and then I tried to turn the conversation:—

"Have you had any alarm from bushrangers lately? I heard a report of some convicts having landed on the coast."

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"All a false alarm!" said the Major. "They were drowned, and the boat washed ashore, bottom upwards."

Here the Doctor broke in: "Hamlyn, is not this very queer weather?"

When he called my attention to it, I remarked that the weather was really different from any I had seen before, and said so.

The sky was grey and dull, the distances were clear, and to the eye it appeared merely a soft grey autumnal day. But there was something very strange and odd in the deadly stillness of all nature. Not a leaf moved, not a bird sang, and the air seemed like lead. At once Mrs. Buckley remarked,—

"I can't work, and I can't talk. I am so wretchedly nervous that I don't know what to do with myself, and you know, my dear," she said, appealing to her husband, "that I am not given to that sort of thing."

Each man looked at his neighbour, for there was a sound in the air now—a weird and awful sound like nothing else in nature. To the south arose upon the ear a hollow quivering hum, which swelled rapidly into a roar beneath our feet; then there was a sickening shake, a thump, a crash, and away went the Earthquake, groaning off to the northward.

The women behaved very well, though some of them began to cry; and hearing a fearful row in the kitchen I dashed off there, followed by the Doctor. The interior was a chaos of pots and kettles, in the centre of which sat the cook, Eleanor, holding on by the floor. Every now and then she would give a scream which took all the breath out of her; so she had to stop and fetch breath before she could give another. The Doctor stepped through the saucepans and camp-ovens, and trying to raise her, said,—

"Come, get up, my good woman, and give over screaming. All danger is over, and you will frighten the ladies."

At this moment she got her "second wind," and as he

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tried to get her up she gave such a yell that he dropped her again, and bolted, stopping his ears ; bolted over a tea-kettle which had been thrown down, and fell prostrate, resounding, like an Homeric hero, on to a heap of kitchen utensils, at the feet of Alice, who had come in to see what the noise was about.

“ Good Lord ! ” said he, picking himself up, “ what lungs she has got ! I shall have a singing in my ears to my dying day. Yar ! it went through my head like a knife.”

Sam picked up the cook, and she, after a time, picked up her pots, giving, however, an occasional squall, and holding on by the dresser, under the impression that another earthquake was coming. We left her, however, getting dinner under way, and went back to the others, whom we soon set laughing by telling poor Eleanor’s misadventures.

We were all in good spirits now. A brisk cool wind had come up from the south, following the earthquake, making a pleasant rustle as it swept across the plain or tossed the forest boughs. The sky had got clear, and the nimble air was so inviting that we rose as one body to stroll in groups about the garden and wander down to the river.

The brave old river was rushing hoarsely along, clear and full between his ruined temple-columns of basalt, as of old. “ What a grand salmon-river this would be, Major ! ” said I ; “ what pools and stickles are here ! Ah ! if we only could get the salmon-spawn through the tropics without its germinating.—Can you tell me, Doctor, why these rocks should take the form of columns ? Is there any particular reason for it that you know ? ”

“ You have asked a very puzzling question,” he replied, “ and I hardly know how to answer it. Nine geologists out of ten will tell you that basalt is lava cooled under pressure. But I have seen it in places where that solution was quite inapplicable. However, I can tell you that the

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same cause which set these pillars here to wall the river, piled up yon Organ-hill, produced the caves of Widderin, the great crater-hollow of Mirngish, and accommodated us with that brisk little earthquake which we felt just now. For you know that we mortals stand only on a thin crust of cooled matter, but beneath our feet is all molten metal."

"I wish you could give us a lecture on these things, Doctor," I said.

"To-morrow," said he, "let us ride forth to Mirngish and have a picnic. There I will give you a little sketch of the origin of that hill."

In front of the Brentwoods' house the plains stretched away for a dozen miles or so, a bare sheet of grass with no timber, grey in summer, green in winter. About five miles off it began to roll into great waves, and then heaved up into a high bald hill, a lofty down, capped with black rocks, bearing in its side a vast round hollow, at the bottom of which was a little swamp, perfectly circular, fringed with a ring of white gum-trees, standing in such an exact circle that it was hard to persuade oneself that they were not planted by the hand of man. This was the crater of the old volcano. Had you stood in it you would have remarked that one side was a shelving steep bank of short grass, while the other reared up some five hundred feet, a precipice of fire-eaten rock. At one end the lip had broken down, pouring a torrent of lava, now fertile grass-land, over the surrounding country, which little gap gave one a delicious bit of blue distance. All else, as I said, was a circular wall of grass, rock, and tumbled slag.

This was Mirngish. And the day after the earthquake there was a fresh eruption in the crater. An eruption of horsemen and horsewomen. An eruption of talk, laughter, pink-bonnets, knives and forks, and champagne. Many a pleasant echo came ringing back from the old volcano-walls overhead, only used for so many ages to hear the wild rattle of the thunder and the scream of the hungry eagle.

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Was ever a poor old worn-out grass-grown volcano used so badly? Here into the very pit of Tophet had the audacious Captain that very morning sent on a spring-cart of all eatables and drinkables, and then had followed himself with a dozen of his friends, to eat and drink, and talk and laugh, just in the very spot where of old roared and seethed the fire and brimstone of Erebus.

Yet the good old mountain was civil, for we were not blown into the air, to be a warning to all people picnicing in high places; but when we had eaten and drunk, and all the ladies had separately and collectively declared that they were *so* fond of the smell of tobacco in the open air, we followed the Doctor, who led the way to the summit of the hill.

I arrived last, having dragged dear fat old Mrs. Mayford up the slippery steep. The Doctor had perched himself on the highest flame-worn crag, and when we all had grouped ourselves below him, and while the wind swept pleasantly through the grass, and rushed humming through the ancient rocks, he in a clear melodious voice thus began:—

“Of old the great sea heaved and foamed above the ground on which we stand; aye, above this, and above yon farthest snowy peak, which the westering sun begins to tinge with crimson.

“But in the lapse of ten thousand changing centuries, the lower deeps, acted on by some Plutonic agency, began to grow shallow; and the imprisoned tides began to foam and roar as they struggled to follow the moon, their leader, angry to find that the stillness of their ancient domain was year by year invaded by the ever-rising land.

“At that time, had man been on the earth to see it, those towering Alps were a cluster of lofty islands, each mountain pass which divides them was a tide-swept fiord, in and out of which, twice in the day, age after age, rushed the sea, bringing down those vast piles of water-worn gravel which you see accumulated, and now cov-

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ered with dense vegetation, at the mouth of each great valley.

“So twenty thousand years went on, and all this fair champagne country which we overlook became, first a sand-bank, then a dreary stretch of salt-saturated desert, and then, as the roar of the retiring ocean grew fainter and fainter, began to sustain such vegetation as the Lord thought fit.

“A thousand years are but as yesterday to Him, and I can give you no notion as to how many hundred thousand years it took to do all this ; or what productions covered the face of the country. It must have been a miserably poor region : nothing but the débris of granite, sandstone, and slate ; perhaps here and there partially fertilized by rotting sea-weed, dead fish and shells ; things which would, we may assume, have appeared and flourished as the water grew shallower.

“New elements were wanting to make the country available for man, so soon to appear in his majesty ; and new elements were forthcoming. The internal fires so long imprisoned beneath the weight of the incumbent earth, having done their duty in raising the continent, began to find vent in every weak spot caused by its elevation.

“Here, where we stand, in this great crack between the granite and the sandstone, they broke out with all their wildest fury ; hurling stones high in the air, making mid-day dark with clouds of ashes, and pouring streams of lava far and wide.

“So the country was desolated by volcanoes, but only desolated that it might grow greener and richer than ever, with a new and hitherto unknown fertility ; for, as the surface of the lava disintegrated, a new soil was found, containing all the elements of the old one, and many more. These are your black clay, and your red burnt soil, which, I take it, are some of the richest in the world.

“Then our old volcano, our familiar Mirngish, in whose crater we have been feasting, grew still for a time, for

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many ages probably; but after that I see the traces of another eruption; the worst, perhaps, that he ever accomplished.

“He had exhausted himself, and gradually subsided, leaving a perfect cup or crater, the accumulation of the ashes of a hundred eruptions; nay, even this may have been filled with water, as is Mount Gambier, which you have not seen, forming a lake without a visible outlet; the water draining off at that level where the looser scorïæ begin.

“But he burst out again, filling this great hollow with lava, till the accumulation of the molten matter broke through the weaker part of the wall, and rolled away there, out of that gap to the northward, and forming what you now call the ‘stony rises,’—turning yon creek into steam, which by its explosive force formed that fantastic cap of rocks, and, swelling into great bubbles under the hot lava, made those long underground hollows which we now know as the caves of Bar-ca-nah.

“Is he asleep for ever? I know not. He may arise again in his wrath and fill the land with desolation; for that earthquake we felt yesterday was but a wild throe of the giant struggling to be free.

“Let us hope that he may not break his chains, for as I stand here gazing on those crimson Alps, the spirit of prophecy is upon me, and I can see far into the future, and all the desolate landscape becomes peopled with busy figures.

“I see the sunny slopes below me yellow with trellised vines. They have gathered the vintage, and I hear them singing at the wine-press. They sing that the exhausted vineyards of the old world yield no wine so rare, so rich, as the fresh volcanic slopes of the southern continent, and that the princes of the earth send their wealth that their hearts may get glad from the juice of the Australian grapes.

“Beyond I see fat black ridges grow yellow with a

thousand cornfields. I see a hundred happy homesteads, half-hidden by clustering wheatstacks. What do they want with all that corn? say you; where is their market?

"There is their market! Away there on the barren forest ranges. See, the timber is gone, and a city stands there instead. What is that on the crest of the hill? A steam-engine: nay, see, there are five of them, working night and day, fast and busy. Their cranks gleam and flash under the same moon that grew red and lurid when old Mirngish vomited fire and smoke twenty thousand years ago. As I listen I can hear the grinding of the busy quartz-mill. What are they doing? you ask. They are gold-mining.

"They have found gold here, and gold in abundance, and hither have come, by ship and steamship, all the unfortunate of the earth. The English factory labourer and the farmer-ridden peasant; the Irish pauper; the starved Scotch Highlander. I hear a grand swelling chorus rising above the murmur of the evening breeze; that is sung by German peasants revelling in such plenty as they never knew before, yet still regretting fatherland, and then I hear a burst of Italian melody replying. Hungarians are not wanting, for all the oppressed of the earth have taken refuge here, glorying to live under the free government of Britain; for she, warned by American experience, has granted to all her colonies such rights as the British boast of possessing."

I did not understand him then. But, since I have seen the living wonder of Ballarat, I understand him well enough.

He ceased. But the Major cried out, "Go on, Doctor, go on. Look farther yet, and tell us what you see. Give us a bit more poetry while your hand is in."

He faced round, and I fancied I could detect a latent smile about his mouth.

"I see," said he, "a vision of a nation, the colony of the greatest race on the earth, who began their career with

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more advantages than ever fell to the lot of a young nation yet. War never looked on them. Not theirs was the lot to fight, like the Americans, through bankruptcy and inexperience towards freedom and honour. No. Freedom came to them, Heaven-sent, red-tape-bound, straight from Downing-street. Millions of fertile acres, gold in bushels were theirs, and yet——”

“Go on,” said the Major.

“I see a vision of broken railway arches and ruined farms. I see a vision of a people surfeited with prosperity and freedom grown factious, so that now one party must command a strong majority ere they can pass a law the goodness of which no one denies. I see a bankrupt exchequer, a drunken Governor, an Irish ministry, a——”

“Come down out of that,” roared the Major, “before I pull you down. You’re a pretty fellow to come out for a day’s pleasure! Jeremiah was a saint to him,” he added, turning appealingly to the rest of us. “Hear my opinion, ‘per contra,’ Doctor. I’ll be as near right as you.”

“Go on, then,” said the Doctor.

“I see,” began the Major, “the Anglo-Saxon race——”

“Don’t forget the Irish, Jews, Germans, Chinese, and other barbarians,” interrupted the Doctor.

“Asserting,” continued the Major, scornfully, “as they always do, their right to all the unoccupied territories of the earth——”

(“Blackfellow’s claims being ignored,” interpolated the Doctor.)

“And filling all the harbours of this magnificent country——”

(“Want to see them.”)

“With their steamships and their sailing vessels. Say there be gold here, as I believe there is, the time must come when the mines will be exhausted. What then? With our coals we shall supply——”

“Newcastle,” said the Doctor, again.

“The British fleets in the East Indies——”

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"And compete with Borneo," said the Doctor, quietly, "which contains more coal than ever India will burn, at one-tenth the distance from her that we are. If that is a specimen of your prophecies, Major, you are but a Micaiah after all."

"Well," said the Major, laughing, "I cannot reel it off quite so quick as you; but think we shall hardly have time for any more prophesying; the sun is getting very low."

We turned and looked to westward. The lofty rolling snow-downs had changed to dull lead-colour, as the sun went down in a red haze behind them; only here and there some little elevated pinnacle would catch the light. Below the mountain lay vast black sheets of woodland, and nearer still was the river, marked distinctly by a dense and rapidly-rising line of fog.

"We are going to have a fog and a frost," said the Major. "We had better hurry home."

Behind all the others rode Alice, Sam, and myself. I was fearful of being "de trop," but when I tried to get forward to the laughing, chattering, crowd in front, these two young lovers raised such an outcry that I was fain to stay with them, which I was well pleased to do.

Behind us, however, rode three mounted servants, two of Captain Brentwood's, and my man Dick.

We were almost in sight of the river, nearly home in fact, when there arose a loud lamentation from Alice.

"Oh, my bracelet! my dear bracelet! I have lost it."

"Have you any idea where you dropped it?" I inquired.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I am sure it must have been when I fell down, scrambling up the rocks, just before the Doctor began his lecture. Just as I reached the top, you know, I fell down, and I must have lost it there."

"I will ride back and find it, then, in no time," I said.

"No, indeed, Uncle Jeff," said Sam. "I will go back."

"I use an uncle's authority," I replied, "and I forbid you. That miserable old pony of yours, which you have

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chosen to bring out to-day, has had quite work enough, without ten miles extra. I condescend to no argument; here I go."

I turned, with a kind look from both of them, but ere I had gone ten yards, my servant Dick was alongside of me.

"Where are you going, sir?" said he.

"I am going back to Mirngish," I replied. "Miss Alice has dropped her bracelet, and I am going back for it."

"I will come with you, sir," he said.

"Indeed no, Dick; there is no need. Go back to your supper, lad, I shan't be long away."

"I am coming with you, sir," he replied. "Company is a good thing sometimes."

"Well, boy," I said, "if you will come, I shall be glad of your company; so come along."

I had noticed lately that Dick never let me go far alone, but would always be with me. It gave rise to no suspicion in my mind. He had been tried too often for that. But still, I thought it strange.

On this occasion, we had not ridden far before he asked me a question which rather surprised me. He said,—

"Mr. Hamlyn; do you carry pistols?"

"Why, Dick, boy?" I said, "why should I?"

"Look you here, Mr. Hamlyn," said he. "Have you tried me?"

"I have tried you for twenty years, Dick, and have not found you wanting."

"Ah!" said he, "that's good hearing. You're a magistrate, sir, though only just made. But you know that coves like me, that have been in trouble, get hold of information which you beaks can't. And I tell you, sir, there's bad times coming for this country side. You carry your pistols, sir, and, what's more, *you use 'em*. See here."

He opened his shirt, and showed me a long sharp knife inside.

"That's what I carries, sir, in these times, and you

ought to carry ditto, and a brace of barkers besides. We shan't get back to the Captain's to-night."

We were rising on the first shoulder of Mirngish, and daylight was rapidly departing. I looked back. Nothing but a vast sea of fog, one snow peak rising from it like an iceberg from a frozen sea, piercing the clear frosty air like a crystal of lead and silver.

"We must hurry on," I said, "or we shall never have daylight to find the bracelet. We shall never find our way home through that fog, without a breath of wind to guide us. What shall we do?"

"I noticed to-day, sir," said Dick, "a track that crossed the hill to the east; if we can get on that, and keep on it, we are sure to get somewhere. It would be better to follow that than go blundering across the plain through such a mist as that."

As he was speaking, we had dismounted and commenced our search. In five minutes, so well did our recollection serve us, Dick had got the bracelet, and having mounted our horses, we deliberated what was next to be done.

A thick fog covered the whole country, and was rapidly creeping up to the elevation on which we stood. To get home over the plains without a compass seemed a hopeless matter. So we determined to strike for the track which Dick had noticed in the morning, and get on it before it was dark.

We plunged down into the sea of fog, and, by carefully keeping the same direction, we found our road. The moon was nearly full, which enabled us to distinguish it, though we could never see above five yards in front of us.

We followed the road above an hour; then we began to see ghostly tree-stems through the mist. They grew thicker and more frequent. Then we saw a light, and at last rode up to a hut-door, cheered by the warm light, emanating from a roaring fire within, which poured through

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every crack in the house-side, and made the very fog look warm.

I held Dick's horse while he knocked. The door was opened by a wee feeble old man, about sixty, with a sharp clever face, and an iron-grey rough head of hair.

"Night, daddy," said Dick. "Can me and my master stay here to-night? We're all abroad in this fog. The governor will leave something handsome behind in the morning, old party, I know." (This latter was in a whisper.)

"Canst thou stay here, say'st thou?" replied the old fellow. "In course thou canst. But thy master's money may bide in a's pouch. Get thy saddles off, lad, and come in; 'tis a smittle night for rheumatics."

I helped Dick to take off the saddles, and, having hobbled our horses with stirrup-leathers, we went in.

Our little old friend was the hut-keeper, as I saw at a glance. The shepherd was sitting on a block before the fire, in his shirt, smoking his pipe and warming his legs preparatory to turning in.

I understood him in a moment, as I then thought (though I was much deceived). A short, wiry, black-headed man, with a cunning face—convict all over. He rose as we came in, and gave us good-evening. I begged he would not disturb himself; so he moved his block into the corner, and smoked away with that lazy indifference that only a shepherd is master of.

But the old man began bustling about. He made us sit down before the fire, and make ourselves comfortable. He never ceased talking.

"I'll get ye lads some supper just now," said he. "There's na but twa bunks i' the hut; so master and man must lie o' the floor, 'less indeed the boss lies in my bed, which he's welcome to. We've a plenty blankets, though, and sheepskins. We'll mak ye comfortable, boys. There's a mickle back log o' the fire, and ye'll lie warm, I'se warrant ye. There's cowl beef, sir (to me), and good

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breed, no' to mind boggins o' tea. Ye'll be comfortable, will ye. What's your name?"

"Hamlyn," I said.

"Oh, ay; Ye're Hamlyn and Stockbridge! I ken he well; I kenned yer partner: a good man—a very good man, a man o' ten thousand. He was put down up north. A bad job—a very bad job! Ye gat terrible vengeance, though. Ye hewed Agag in pieces! T' Governor up there to Sydney was wild angry at what ye did, but he darena' say much. He knew that every free man's heart went with ye. It were the sword of the Lord and of Gideon that ye fought with! Ye saved many good lives by that raid of yours after Stockbridge was killed. The devils wanted a lesson, and ye gar'd them read one wi' a vengeance!"

During this speech, which was uttered in a series of interjections, we had made our supper, and drawn back to the fire. The shepherd had tumbled into his blankets, and was snoring. The old man, having cleared away the things, came and sat down beside us. The present of a fig of tobacco won his heart utterly, and he, having cut up a pipeful, began talking again.

"Why," said he, "it's the real Barret's twist—the very real article! Eh, master, ye're book-learned: do you ken where this grows? It must be a fine country to bring up such backer as this; some o' they Palm Isles, I reckon."

"Virginia," I told him, "or Carolina, one of the finest countries in the world, where they hold slaves."

"Ah," said he, "they couldn't get white men to mess with backer and such in a hot country, and in course, every one knows that blacks won't work till they're made. That's why they bothers themselves with 'em, I reckon. But, Lord! they are useless trash. White convicts is useless enough; think what black niggers must be!"

How about the gentleman in bed? I thought; but he was snoring comfortably.

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"I am a free man, myself," continued the old man. "I never did aught, ay, or thought o' doing aught, that an honest man should not do. But I've lived among convicts twenty odd year, and do you know, sir, sometimes I hardly know richt fra wrang. Sometimes I see things that whiles I think I should inform of, and then the devil comes and tells me it would be dishonourable. And then I believe him till the time's gone by, and after that I am miserable in my conscience. So I haven't an easy time of it, though I have good times, and money to spare."

I was getting fond of the honest, talkative old fellow ; so when Dick asked him if he wanted to turn in, and he answered no, I was well pleased.

"Can't you pitch us a yarn, daddy ?" said Dick. "Tell us something about the old country. I should like well to hear what you were at home."

"I'll pitch ye a yarn, lad," he replied, "if the master don't want to turn in. I'm fond of talking. All old men are, I think," he said, appealing to me. "The time's coming, ye see, when the gift o' speech will be gone from me. It's a great gift. But happen we won't lose it after all."

I said, "No, that I thought not ; that I thought on the other side of the grave we should both speak and hear of higher things than we did in the flesh."

"Happen so," said he ; "I think so too, sometime. I'll give ye my yarn ; I have told it often. Howsoever, neither o' ye have heard it, so ye're the luckier that I tell it better by frequent repetition. Here it is :

"I was a collier lad, always lean, and not well favoured, though I was active and strong. I was small too, and that set my father's heart agin me somewhat, for he was a gran' man, and a mighty fighter.

"But my elder brother Jack, he was a mighty fellow, God bless him ; and when he was eighteen he weighed twelve stone, and was earning man's wages, tho' that I

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was hurrying still. I saw that father loved him better than me, and whiles that vexed me, but most times it didn't, for I cared about the lad as well as father did, and he liked me the same. He never went far without me ; and whether he fought, or whether he drunk, I must be wi' him and help.

" Well, so we went on till, as I said, I was seventeen, and he eighteen. We never had a word till then ; we were as brothers should be. But at this time we had a quarrel, the first we ever had ; ay, and the last, for we got something to mind this one by.

" We both worked in the same pit. It was the South-stone Pit ; happen you've heard of it. No ? Well, these things get soon forgot. Father had been an overman there, but was doing better now above ground. He and mother kept a bit shop, and made money.

" There was a fair in our village, a poor thing enough ; but when we boys were children we used to look forward to it eleven months out o' twelve, and the day it came round we used to go to father, and get sixpence, or happen a shilling apiece to spend.

" Well, time went on till we came to earn money ; but still we kept up the custom, and went to the old man reg'lar for our fairin', and he used to laugh and chaff us as he'd give us a fourpenny or such, and we liked the joke as well as he.

" Well this time—it was '12, just after the comet, just the worst times of the war, the fair come round 24th of May, I well remember, and we went in to the old man to get summut to spend—just for a joke, like.

" He'd lost money, and been vexed ; so when Jack asked him for his fairin' he gi'ed him five shillin', and said, ' I'll go to gaol but what my handsome boy shan't have summut to treat his friends to beer.' But when I axed him, he said, ' Earn man's wages, and thee'll get a man's fairin', ' and heaved a penny at me.

" That made me wild mad, I tell you. I wasn't only

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angry wi' the old man, but I was mad wi' Jack, poor lad ! The devil of jealousy had got into me, and, instead of kicking him out I nursed him. I ran out o' the house, and away into the fair, and drunk, and fought, and swore like a mad one.

" I was in one of the dancing booths, half drunk, and a young fellow came to me, and said, ' Where has thee been ? Do thee know thy brother has foughten Jim Perry, and beaten him ? '

" I felt like crying, to think my brother had fought, and I not there to set him up. But I swore, and said, ' I wish Jim Perry had killed un ; ' and then I sneaked off home to bed, and cried like a lass.

" And next morning I was up before him, and down the pit. He worked a good piece from me, so I did not see him, and it came on nigh nine o'clock before I began to wonder why the viewer had not been round, for I had heard say there was a foul place cut into by some of them, and at such times the viewer generally looks into every corner.

" Well, about nine, the viewer and underviewer came up with the overman, and stood talking alongside of me, when there came a something sudden and sharp, as tho' one had boxed your ears, and then a ' whiz, whiz, ' and the viewer stumbled a one side, and cried out, ' God save us ! '

" I hardly knew what had happened till I heard him singing out clear and firm, ' Come here to me, you lads ; come here. Keep steady, and we'll be all right yet. ' Then I knew it was a fire, and a sharp one, and began crying out for Jack.

" I heard him calling for me, and then he ran up and got hold of me ; and so ended the only quarrel we ever had, and that was a one-sided one.

" ' Are you all here ? ' said the viewer. ' Now follow me, and if we meet the afterdamp hold your breath and run. I am afraid it's a bad job, but we may get through yet. '

“ We had not gone fifty yards before we came on the afterdamp, filling the headway like smoke. Jack and I took hold of each other's collars and ran, but before we were half way through, he fell. I kept good hold of his shirt, and dragged him on on the ground. I felt as strong as a horse ; and in ten seconds, which seemed to me like ten hours, I dragged him out under the shaft into clear air. At first I thought he was dead, but he was still alive, and very little of that. His heart beat very slow, and I thought he'd die ; but I knew if he got clear air that he might come round.

“ When we had gotten to the shaft bottom we found it all full of smoke ; the waft had gone straight up, and they on the top told us after that all the earth round was shook, and the black smoke and coal-dust flew up as though from a gun-barrel. Any way it was strong enough to carry away the machine, so we waited there ten minutes and wondered the basket did not come down ; but they above, meanwhile, were rigging a rope to an old horse-whim, and as they could not get horses, the men run the poles round themselves.

“ But we at the bottom knew nothing of all this. There were thirty or so in the shaft bottom, standing there, dripping wet wi' water, and shouting for the others, who never came ; now the smoke began to show in the west drive, and we knew the mine was fired, and yet we heard nought from those above.

“ But what I minded most of all was, that Jack was getting better. I knew we could not well be lost right under the shaft, so I did not swear and go on like some of them, because they did not mind us above. When the basket came down at last, I and Jack went up among the first, and there I saw such a sight, lad, as ye'll never see till ye see a colliery explosion. There were hundreds and hundreds there. Most had got friends or kin in the pit, and as each man came up, his wife or his mother would seize hold of him and carry on terrible.

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“ But the worst were they whose husbands and sons never came up again, and they were many ; for out of one hundred and thirty-one men in the pit, only thirty-nine came up alive. Directly we came to bank, I saw father ; he was first among them that were helping, working like a horse, and directing everything. When he saw us, he said, ‘ Thank the Lord, there’s my two boys. I am not a loser to-day ! ’ and came running to us, and helped me to carry Jack down the bank. He was very weak and sick, but the air freshened him up wonderful.

“ I told father all about it, and he said, ‘ I’ve been wrong, and thou’st been wrong. Don’t thou get angry for nothing ; thou hast done a man’s work to-day, at all events. Now come and bear a hand. T’owd ’ooman will mind the lad.’

“ We went back to the pit’s mouth ; the men were tearing round the whim faster than horses would a’ done it. And first amongst ’em all was old Mrs. Copley, wi’ her long grey hair down her back, doing the work o’ three men ; for her two boys were down still, and I knew for one that they were not with us at the bottom ; but when the basket came up with the last, and her two boys missing, she went across to the master, and asked him what he was going to do, as quiet as possible.

“ He said he was going to ask some men to go down, and my father volunteered to go at once, and eight more went with him. They were soon up again, and reported that all the mine was full of smoke, and no one had dared leave the shaft bottom fifty yards.

“ ‘ It’s clear enough, the mine’s fired, sir,’ said my father to the owner. ‘ They that’s down are dead. Better close it, sir.’

“ ‘ What ! ’ screamed old Mrs. Copley, ‘ close the pit, ye dog, and my boys down there ? Ye wouldn’t do such a thing, master dear ? ’ she continued ; ‘ ye couldn’t do it.’ Many others were wild when they heard the thing proposed ; but while they raved and argued, the pit began to send up

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a reek of smoke like the mouth of hell, and then the master gave orders to close the shaft, and a hundred women knew they were widows, and went weeping home.

"And Jack got well. And after the old man died, we came out here. Jack has gotten a public-house in Yass, and next year I shall go home and live with him.

"And that's the yarn about the fire at the Southstone Pit."

We applauded it highly, and after a time began to talk about lying down, when on a sudden we heard a noise of horses' feet outside: then the door was opened, and in came a stranger.

He was a stranger to me, but not to my servant, who I could see recognised him, though he gave no sign of it in words. I also stared at him, for he was the handsomest young man I had ever seen.

Handsome as an Apollo, beautiful as a leopard, but with such a peculiar style of beauty, that when you looked at him you instinctively felt at your side for a weapon of defence, for a more reckless, dangerous looking man I never yet set eyes on. And while I looked at him I recognised him. I had seen his face, or one like it, before, often, often. And it seemed as though I had known him just as he stood there, years and years ago, on the other side of the world. I was almost certain it was so, and yet he seemed barely twenty. It was an impossibility, and yet as I looked I grew every moment more certain.

He dashed in in an insolent way. "I am going to quarter here to-night and chance it," he said. "Hallo! Dick, my prince! You here? And what may your name be, old cock?" he added, turning to me, now seeing me indistinctly for the first time, for I was sitting back in the shadow.

"My name is Geoffry Hamlyn. I am a Justice of the Peace, and I am at your service," I said. "Now perhaps you will favour me with *your* name?"

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The young gentleman did not seem to like coming so suddenly into close proximity with a "beak," and answered defiantly,—

"Charles Sutton is my name, and I don't know as there's anything against me at present."

"Sutton," I said; "Sutton? I don't know the name. No, I have nothing against you, except that you don't appear very civil."

Soon after I rolled myself in a blanket and lay down. Dick lay at right angles to me, his feet nearly touching mine. He began snoring heavily almost immediately, and just when I was going to give him a kick, and tell him not to make such a row, I felt him give me a good sharp shove with the heel of his boot, by which I understood that he was awake, and meant to keep awake, as he did not approve of the strangers.

I was anxious about our horses, yet in a short time I could keep awake no longer. I slept, and when I next woke, I heard voices whispering eagerly together. I silently turned, so that I could see whence the voices came, and perceived the shepherd sitting up in bed, in close confabulation with the stranger.

"Those two rascals are plotting some villany," I said to myself; "somebody will be minus a horse shortly, I expect." And then I fell asleep again; and when I awoke it was broad day.

I found the young man was gone, and, what pleased me better still, had not taken either of our horses with him. So, when we had taken some breakfast, we started, and I left the kind little old man something to remember me by.

We had not ridden a hundred yards, before I turned to Dick and said,—

"Now mind; I don't want you to tell me anything you don't like, but pray relieve my mind on one point. Who was that young man? Have I ever seen him before?"

"I think not, sir; but I can explain how you come to

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think you have. You remember, sir, that I knew all about Mrs. Hawker's history?"

"Yes! yes! Go on."

"That young fellow is George Hawker's son."

It came upon me like a thunderbolt. This, then, was the illegitimate son that he had by his cousin Ellen. Oh miserable child of sin and shame! to what end, I wondered, had he been saved till now?

We shall see soon. Meanwhile I turned to my companion and said, "Tell me how he came to be here."

"Why you see, sir, he went on in his father's ways, and got lagged. He found his father out as soon as he was free, which wasn't long first, for he is mortal cunning, and since then they two have stuck together. Most times they quarrel, and sometimes they fight, but they are never far apart. Hawker ain't far off now."

"Now, sir," he continued, "I am going to tell you something which, if it ever leaks out of your lips again, in such a way as to show where it came from, will end my life as sure as if I was hung. You remember three months ago that a boatful of men were supposed to have landed from Cockatoo?"

"Yes," I said, "I heard it from Major Buckley. But the police have been scouring in all directions, and can find nothing of them. My opinion is that the boat was capsized, and they were all drowned, and that the surf piled the boat over with sea-weed. Depend on it they did not land."

"Depend on it they did, sir; those men are safe and well, and ready for any mischief. Hawker was on the look-out for them, and they all stowed away till the police cleared off, which they did last week. There will be mischief soon. There; I have told you enough to cut my throat, and I'll tell you more, and convince you that I am right. That shepherd at whose hut we stayed last night was one of them; that fellow was the celebrated Captain Mike. What do you think of that?"

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I shuddered as I heard the name of that fell ruffian, and thought that I had slept in the hut with him. But when I remembered how he was whispering with the stranger in the middle of the night, I came to the conclusion that serious mischief was brewing, and pushed on through the fog, which still continued as dense as ever, and, guided by some directions from the old hut-keeper, I got to Captain Brentwood's about ten o'clock, and told him and the Major the night's adventures.

We three armed ourselves secretly and quietly, and went back to the hut with the determination of getting possession of the person of the shepherd Mike, who, were he the man Dick accused him of being, would have been a prize indeed, being one of the leading Van Diemen's Land rangers, and one of the men reported as missing by Captain Blockstrop.

"Suppose," said Captain Brentwood, "that we seize the fellow, and it isn't him after all?"

"Then," said the Major, "an action for false imprisonment would lie, sir, decidedly. But we will chance it."

And when we got there we saw the old hut-keeper, he of the colliery explosion experiences, shepherding the sheep himself, and found that the man we were in search of had left the hut that morning, apparently to take the sheep out. But that going out about eleven the old man had found them still in the yard, whereby he concluded that the shepherd was gone, which proved to be the case. And making further inquiries we found that the shepherd had only been hired a month previously, and no man knew whence he came: all of which seemed to confirm Dick's story wonderfully, and made us excessively uneasy. And in the end the Major asked me to prolong my visit for a time and keep my servant with me, as every hand was of use; and so it fell out that I happened to be present at, and chronicle all which follows.

Chapter XI

In which George Hawker settles an old Score with William Lee, most handsomely, leaving, in Fact, a large Balance in his own Favour

I PAUSE here—I rather dread to go on. Although our course has been erratic and irregular : although we have had one character disappearing for a long time (like Tom Troubridge) ; and, although we have had another entirely new, coming bobbing up in the manner of Punch's victims, unexpected, and apparently unwanted ; although, I say, the course of this story may have been ill-arranged in the highest degree, and you may have been continually coming across some one in Vol. II. who forced you to go back to Vol. I. to find out who he was ; yet, on the whole, we have got on pleasantly enough as things go. Now, I am sorry to say I have to record two or three fearful catastrophes. The events of the next month are seldom alluded to by any of those persons mentioned in the preceding pages ; they are too painful. I remark that the Lucknow and Cawnpore men don't much like talking about the affairs of that terrible six weeks ; much for the same reason, I suspect, as we, going over our old recollections, always omit the occurrences of this lamentable spring.

The facts contained in the latter end of this chapter I got from the Gaol Chaplain at Sydney.

The Major, the Captain, and I, got home to dinner, confirmed in our suspicions that mischief was abroad, and very vexed at having missed the man we went in search of. Both Mrs. Buckley and Alice noticed that something was wrong, but neither spoke a word on the subject. Mrs. Buckley now and then looked anxiously at her husband, and Alice cast furtive glances at her father. The rest took no notice of our silence and uneasiness, little dream-

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ing of the awful cloud that was hanging above our heads, to burst, alas ! so soon.

I was sitting next to Mary Hawker that evening, talking over old Devon days and Devon people, when she said,—

“I think I am going to have some more quiet peaceful times. I am happier than I have been for many years. Do you know why? Look there.”

I shuddered to hear her say so, knowing what I knew, but looked where she pointed. Her son sat opposite to us, next to the pretty Ellen Mayford. She had dropped the lids over her eyes and was smiling. He, with his face turned toward her, was whispering in his eager impulsive way, and tearing to pieces a slip of paper which he held in his hand. As the firelight fell on his face, I felt a chill come over me. The likeness was so fearful!—not to the father (that I had been long accustomed to), but to the son, to the half-brother—to the poor lost young soul I had seen last night, the companion of desperate men. As it struck me I could not avoid a start, and a moment after I would have given a hundred pounds not to have done so, for I felt Mary’s hand on my arm, and heard her say, in a low voice,—

“Cruel ! cruel ! Will you never forget ? ”

I felt guilty and confused. As usual, on such occasions, Satan was at my elbow, ready with a lie, more or less clumsy, and I said, “You do me injustice, Mrs. Hawker, I was not thinking of old times. I was astonished at what I see there. Do you think there is anything in it ? ”

“I sincerely hope so,” she said.

“Indeed, and so do I. It will be excellent on every account. Now,” said I, “Mrs. Hawker, will you tell me what has become of your old servant, Lee ? I have reasons for asking.”

“He is in my service still,” she said ; “as useful and faithful as ever. At present he is away at a little hut in the ranges, looking after our ewes.”

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"Who is with him?" I asked.

"Well, he has got a new hand with him, a man who came about a month or so ago, and stayed about splitting wood. I fancy I heard Lee remark that he had known him before. However, when Lee had to go to the ranges, he wanted a hut-keeper; so this man went up with him."

"What sort of a looking man was he?"

"Oh, a rather large man, red-haired, much pitted with the small-pox."

All this made me uneasy. I had asked these questions by the advice of Dick, and, from Mrs. Hawker's description tallying so well with his, I had little doubt that another of the escaped gang was living actually in her service, alone, too, in the hut with Lee.

The day that we went to Mirngish, the circumstances I am about to relate took place in Lee's hut, a lonely spot, eight miles from the home station, towards the mountain, and situated in a dense dark stringy-bark forest—a wild desolate spot, even as it was that afternoon, with the parrots chattering and whistling around it, and the bright winter's sun lighting up the green tree-tops.

Lee was away, and the hut-keeper was the only living soul about the place. He had just made some bread, and, having carried out his camp-oven to cool, was sitting on the bench in the sun, lazily, thinking what he would do next.

He was a long, rather powerfully-built man, and seemed at first sight, merely a sleepy half-witted fellow, but at a second glance you might perceive that there was a good deal of cunning, and some ferocity in his face. He sat for some time, and beginning to think that he would like a smoke, he got out his knife preparatory to cutting tobacco.

The hut stood at the top of a lone gully, stretching away in a vista, nearly bare of trees for a width of about ten yards or so, all the way down, which gave it the appearance of a grass-ride, walled on each side by tall dark forest. Looking down this, our hut-keeper saw, about a

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quarter of a mile off, a horseman cross from one side to the other.

He only caught a momentary glimpse of him, but that was enough to show him that it was a stranger. He neither knew horse nor man, at least judging by his dress ; and while he was still puzzling his brains as to what stranger would be coming to such an out-of-the-way place, he heard the " Chuck, kuk, kuk, kuk," of an opossum close behind the hut, and started to his feet.

It would of course have startled any bushman to hear an opossum cry in broad day, but he knew what this meant well. It was the arranged signal of his gang, and he ran to the place from whence the sound came.

George Hawker was there—well dressed, sitting on a noble chestnut horse. They greeted one another with a friendly curse.

As is my custom, when recording the conversations of this class of worthies, I suppress the expletives, thereby shortening them by nearly one half, and depriving the public of much valuable information.

" Well, old man," began Hawker, " is the coast clear ? "

" No one here but myself," replied the other. " I'm hut-keeping here for one Bill Lee, but he is away. He was one of the right sort once himself, I have heard ; but he's been on the square for twenty years, so I don't like to trust him."

" You are about right there, Moody, my lad," said Hawker. " I've just looked up to talk to you about him, and other matters,—I'll come in. When will he be back ? "

" Not before night, I expect," said the other.

" Well," said Hawker, " we shall have the more time to talk ; I've got a good deal to tell you. Our chaps are all safe and snug, and the traps are off. Only two, that's you and Mike, stayed this side of the hill ; the rest crossed the ranges and stowed away in an old lair of mine in one of the upper Murray gullies. They've had pretty hard times, and if it hadn't been for the cash they brought

away, they'd have had worse. Now the coast is clear, they're coming back by ones and twos, and next week we shall be ready for business. I'm going to be head man this bout, because I know the country better than any; and the most noble Michael has consented, for this time only, to act as lieutenant. We haven't decided on any plans yet, but some think of beginning from the coast, because that part will be clearest of traps, they having satisfied themselves that we ain't there. In fact, the wiseacres have fully determined that we are all drowned. There's one devil of a foreign doctor knows I'm round though: he saw me the night before you came ashore, and I am nigh sure he knew me. I have been watching him, and I could have knocked him over last week as clean as a whistle, only, thinks I, it'll make a stir before the time. Never mind, I'll have him yet. This Lee is a black sheep, lad. I'm glad you are here; you must watch him, and if you see him flinch, put a knife in him. He raised the country on me once before. I tell you, Jerry, that I'd be hung, and willing, to-morrow, to have that chap's life, and I'd have had it before now, only I had to keep still for the sake of the others. That man served me the meanest, dirtiest trick, twenty years ago, in the old country, that ever you or any other man heard of, and if he catches sight of me the game's up. Mind, if you see cause, you deal with him, or else,——" (with an awful oath) "you answer to the others."

"If he's got to go, he'll go," replied the other, doggedly. "Don't you fear me; Moody the cannibal ain't a man to flinch."

"What, is that tale true, then?" asked Hawker, looking at his companion with a new sort of interest.

"Why, in course it is," replied Moody; "I thought no one doubted that. That Van Diemen's Land bush would starve a bandicoot, and Shiner and I walked two days before we knocked the boy on the head; the lad was getting beat, and couldn't a' gone much further. After three days

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more we began to watch one another, and neither one durst walk first, or go to sleep. Well, Shiner gave in first; he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. And then, you know, of course, my own life was dearer than his'n."*

"My God! That's worse than ever I did!" said Hawker.

"But not worse than you may do, if you persevere. You promise well," said Moody, with a grin.

Hawker bent and whispered in his ear; the other listened for a time, and then said,—

"Make it twenty."

Hawker after a little consideration nodded—then the other nodded—then they whispered together again. Something out of the common this must be, that they, not very particular in their confidences, should whisper about it.

They looked up suddenly, and Lee was standing in the doorway.

Hawker and he started when they saw one another, but Lee recovered himself first, and said,—

"George Hawker, it's many years since we met, and I'm not so young as I was. I should like to make peace before I go, as I well know that I'm the chief one to blame for you getting into trouble. I'm not humbugging you, when I say that I have been often sorry for it of late years. But sorrow won't do any good. If you'll forgive and forget, I'll do the same. You tried my life once, and that's worse than ever I did for you. And now I'll tell you, that if you want money to get out of the country and set up anywhere else, and leave your poor wife in peace, I'll find it for you out of my own pocket."

* This story is true in every particular, and is, or was, notorious in Van Diemen's Land. Two convicts and a boy escaped, and, trying to cross the island, got short of provisions. They killed the boy, and lived on his flesh while it lasted. After that, one of the men murdered the other, whose flesh lasted long enough to take him back to the settlement, where he surrendered himself. I ought to apologize for telling such a terrible tale, but it is strictly true.

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"I don't bear any malice," said Hawker; "but I don't want to leave the country just yet. I suppose you won't peach about having seen me here?"

"I shan't say a word, George, if you keep clear of the home station; but I won't have you come about there. So I warn you."

Lee held out his hand, and George took it. Then he asked him if he would stay there that night, and George consented.

Day was fast sinking behind the trees, and making golden boughs overhead. Lee stood at the hut door watching the sun set, and thinking, perhaps, of old Devon. He seemed sad, and let us hope he was regretting his old crimes while time was left him. Night was closing in on him, and having looked once more on the darkening sky, and the fog coldly creeping up the gully, he turned with a sigh and a shudder into the hut, and shut the door.

Near midnight, and all was still. Then arose a cry upon the night so hideous, so wild, and so terrible, that the roosting birds dashed off affrighted, and the dense mist, as though in sympathising fear, prolonged the echoes a hundredfold. One articulate cry, "Oh! you treacherous dog!" given with the fierce energy of a dying man, and then night returned to her stillness, and the listeners heard nothing but the weeping of the moisture from the wintry trees.

* * * * *

The two perpetrators of the atrocity stood silent a minute or more, recovering themselves. Then Hawker said in a fierce whisper,—

"You clumsy hound; why did you let him make that noise? I shall never get it out of my head again, if I live till a hundred. Let's get out of this place before I go mad; I could not stay in the house with it for salvation. Get his horse, and come along."

They got the two horses, and rode away into the night; but Hawker, in his nervous anxiety to get away, dropped

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a handsome cavalry pistol,—a circumstance which nearly cost Dr. Mulhaus his life.

They rode till after daylight, taking a course toward the sea, and had gone nearly twelve miles before George discovered his loss, and broke out into petulant imprecations.

"I wouldn't have lost that pistol for five pounds," he said; "no nor more. I shall never have one like it again. I've put over a parrot at twenty yards with it."

"Go back and get it then," said Moody, "if it's so valuable. I'll camp and wait for you. We want all the arms we can get."

"Not I," said George; "I would not go back into that cursed hut alone for all the sheep in the country."

"You coward," replied the other; "afraid of a dead man! Well, if you won't, I will; and, mind, I shall keep it for my own use."

"You're welcome to it, if you like to get it," said George. And so Moody rode back.

Chapter XII

How Dr. Mulhaus got bushed in the Ranges, and what befel him there

I MUST recur to the same eventful night again, and relate another circumstance that occurred on it. As events thicken, time gets more precious; so that, whereas at first I thought nothing of giving you the events of twenty years or so in a chapter, we are now compelled to concentrate time so much that it takes three chapters to twenty-four hours. I read a long novel once, the incidents of which did not extend over thirty-six hours, and yet it was not so profoundly stupid as you would suppose.

All the party got safe home from the picnic, and were glad enough to get housed out of the frosty air. The Doctor, above all others, was rampant at the thoughts of

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dinner, and a good chat over a warm fire, and burst out, in a noble bass voice, with an old German student's song about wine and Gretchen, and what not.

His music was soon turned into mourning ; for, as they rode into the courtyard, a man came up to Captain Brentwood, and began talking eagerly to him.

It was one of his shepherds, who lived alone with his wife towards the mountain. The poor woman, his wife, he said, was taken in labour that morning, and was very bad. Hearing there was a doctor staying at the home station, he had come down to see if he could come to their assistance.

" I'll go, of course," said the Doctor ; " but let me get something to eat first. Is anybody with her ? "

" Yes, a woman was with her ; had been staying with them some days."

" I hope you can find the way in the dark," said the Doctor, " for I can tell you I can't."

" No fear, sir," said the man ; " there's a track all the way, and the moon's full. If it wasn't for the fog it would be as bright as day."

He took a hasty meal, and started. They went at a foot's pace, for the shepherd was on foot. The track was easily seen, and although it was exceedingly cold, the Doctor, being well wrapped up, contrived, with incessant smoking, to be moderately comfortable. All external objects being a blank, he soon turned to his companion to see what he could get out of him.

" What part of the country are you from, my friend ? "

" Fra' the Isle of Skye," the man answered. " I'm one of the Macdonalds of Skye."

" That's a very ancient family, is it not ? " said the Doctor at a venture, knowing he could not go wrong with a Highlander.

" Very ancient, and weel respeckit," the man answered.

" And who is your sheik, rajah, chieftain, or what you call him ? "

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"My lord Macdonald. I am cousin to my lord."

"Indeed! He owns the whole island, I suppose?"

"There's Mackinnons live there. But they are interlopers; they are worthless trash," and he spit in disgust.

"I suppose," said the Doctor, "a Mackinnon would return the compliment, if speaking of a Macdonald."

The man laughed, and said, he supposed "Yes," then added, "See! what's yon?"

"A white stump burnt black at one side,—what did you think it was?"

"I jaloused it might be a ghaist. There's a many ghaists and bogles about here."

"I should have thought the country was too young for those gentry," said the Doctor.

"It's a young country, but there's been muckle wickedness done in it. And what are those blacks do you think?—next thing to devils—at all events they're no' exactly human."

"Impish, decidedly," said the Doctor. "Have you ever seen any ghosts, friend?"

"Ay! many. A fortnight ago, come to-morrow, I saw the ghost of my wife's brother in broad day. It was the time of the high wind ye mind of; and the rain drove so thick I could no' see all my sheep at once. And a man on a white horse came fleeing before the wind close past me; I knew him in a minute; it was my wife's brother, as I tell ye, that was hung fifteen years ago for sheep-stealing, and he wasn't so much altered as ye'd think."

"Some one else like him!" suggested the Doctor.

"Deil a fear," replied the man, "for when I cried out and said, 'What, Col, lad! Gang hame, and lie in yer grave, and dinna trouble honest folk,' he turned and rode away through the rain, straight from me."

"Well!" said the Doctor, "I partly agree with you that the land's bewitched. I saw a man not two months

ago who ought to have been dead five or six years at least. But are you quite sure the man you saw was hung ? ”

“ Well nigh about,” he replied. “ When we sailed from Skye he was under sentence, and they weren’t over much given to reprieve for sheep-stealing in those days. It was in consequence o’ that that I came here.”

“ That’s a very tolerable ghost story,” said the Doctor. “ Have you got another ? If you have, I shouldn’t mind hearing it, as it will beguile the way.”

“ Did ye ever hear how Faithful’s lot were murdered by the blacks up on the Merrimerangbong ? ”

“ No, but I should like to ; is it a ghost story ? ”

“ Deed ay, and is it. This is how it happened :—When Faithful came to take up his country across the mountains yonder, they were a strong party, enough to have been safe in any country, but whether it was food was scarce, or whether it was on account of getting water, I don’t know, but they separated, and fifteen of them got into the Yackandandah country before the others.

“ Well, you see, they were pretty confident, being still a strong mob, and didn’t set any watch or take any care. There was one among them (Cranky Jim they used to call him—he has told me this yarn—he used to be about Reid’s mill last year) who always was going on at them to take more care, but they never heeded him at all.

“ They found a fine creek, with plenty of feed and water, and camped at it to wait till the others came up. They saw no blacks, nor heard of any, and three days were past, and they began to wonder why the others had not overtaken them.

“ The third night they were all sitting round the fire, laughing and smoking, when they heard a loud co’ee on the opposite side of the scrub, and half-a-dozen of them started up and sang out, ‘ There they are ! ’

“ Well, they all began co’eeing again, and they heard the others in reply, apparently all about in the scrub. So off they starts, one by one, into the scrub, answering and

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hallooing, for it seemed to them that their mates were scattered about, and didn't know where they were. Well, as I said, fourteen of them started into the scrub, to collect the party and bring them up to the fire ; only old Cranky Jim sat still in the camp. He believed, with the others, that it was the rest of their party coming up, but he soon began to wonder how it was that they were so scattered. Then he heard one of them scream, and then it struck him all at once that this was a dodge of the blacks to draw the men from the camp, and, when they were abroad, cut them off one by one, plunder the drays, and drive off the sheep.

" So he dropped, and crawled away in the dark. He heard the co'ees grow fewer and fewer as the men were speared one by one, and at last everything was quiet, and then he knew he was right, and he rose up and fled away.

" In two days he found the other party, and told them what had happened. They came up, and there was some sharp fighting, but they got a good many of their sheep back.

" They found the men lying about singly in the scrub, all speared. They buried them just where they found each one, for it was hot weather. They buried them four foot deep, but they wouldn't lie still.

" Every night, about nine o'clock, they get up again, and begin co'eeing for an hour or more. At first there's a regular coronach of them, then by degrees the shouts get fewer and fewer, and, just when you think it's all over, one will break out loud and clear close to you, and after that all's still again.

" You don't believe that story, I suppose ? "

" If you press me very hard," said the Doctor, " I must confess, with all humility, that I don't ! "

" No more did I," said Macdonald, " till I heard 'em ! "

" Heard them ! " said the Doctor.

" Ay, *and seen them !* " said the man, stopping and turning round.

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“ You most agreeable of men ! pray, tell me how.”

“ Why, you see, last year I was coming down with some wood-drays from Parson Dorken’s, and this Cranky Jim was with us, and told us the same yarn, and when he had finished, he said, ‘ You’ll know whether I speak truth or not to-night, *for we’re going to camp at the place where it happened.*’

“ Well, and so we did, and as well as we could reckon, it was a little past nine when a curlew got up and began crying. That was the signal for the ghosts, and in a minute they were co’eeing like mad all round. As Jim had told us, one by one ceased until all was quiet, and I thought it was over, when I looked, and saw, about a hundred yards off, a tall man in grey crossing a belt of open ground. He put his hand to his mouth, gave a wild shout, and disappeared ! ”

“ Thank you,” said the Doctor. “ I think you mentioned that your wife’s confinement was somewhat sudden.”

“ Yes, rather,” replied the man.

“ Pray, had you been relating any of the charming little tales to her lately—just, we will suppose, to while away the time of the evening ? ”

“ Well, I may have done so,” said Macdonald, “ but I don’t exactly mind.”

“ Ah, so I thought. The next time your good lady happens to be in a similar situation, I think I would refrain from ghost stories. I should not like to commit myself to a decided opinion, but I should be inclined to say that the tales you have been telling me were rather horrible. Is that the light of your hut ? ”

Two noble colley dogs bounded to welcome them, and a beautiful bare-legged girl, about sixteen, ran forth to tell her father, in Gaelic, that the trouble was over, and that a boy was born.

On going in, they found the mother asleep, while her gossip held the baby on her knee ; so the Doctor saw that

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he was not needed, and sat down, to wait until the woman should wake, having first, however, produced from his saddle two bottles of port wine, a present from Alice.

The woman soon woke, and the Doctor, having felt her pulse, and left some medicine, started to ride home again, carrying with him an incense of good wishes from the warm-hearted Highlanders.

Instead of looking carefully for the road, the good Doctor was soon nine fathoms deep into the reasons why the mountaineers and coast folk of all northern countries should be more blindly superstitious than the dwellers in plains and in towns ; and so it happened that, coming to a fork in the track, he disregarded the advice of his horse, and, instead of taking the right hand, as he should have done, he held straight on, and, about two o'clock in the morning, found that not only had he lost his road, but that the track had died out altogether, and that he was completely abroad in the bush.

He was in a very disagreeable predicament. The fog was thicker than ever, without a breath of air ; and he knew that it was as likely as not that it might last for a day or two. He was in a very wild part of the mountain, quite on the borders of all the country used by white men.

After some reflection, he determined to follow the fall of the land, thinking that he was still on the water-shed of the Snowy-river, and hoping, by following down some creek, to find some place he knew.

Gradually day broke, cold and cheerless. He was wet and miserable, and could merely give a guess at the east, for the sun was quite invisible ; but, about eight o'clock, he came on a track, running at right angles to the way he had been going, and marked with the hoofs of two horses, whose riders had apparently passed not many hours before.

Which way should he go ? He could not determine. The horsemen, it seemed to him, as far as he could guess,

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had been going west, while his route lay east. And, after a time, having registered a vow never to stir out of sight of the station again without a compass, he determined to take a contrary direction from them, and to find out where they had come from.

The road crossed gully after gully, each one like the other. The timber was heavy stringy-bark, and, in the lower part of the shallow gullies, the tall white stems of the blue gums stood up in the mist like ghosts. All nature was dripping and dull, and he was chilled and wretched.

At length, at the bottom of a gully, rather more dreary looking, if possible, than all the others, he came on a black reedy waterhole, the first he had seen in his ride, and perceived that the track turned short to the left. Casting his eye along it, he made out the dark indistinct outline of a hut, standing about forty yards off.

He rode up to it. All was as still as death. No man came out to welcome him, no dog jumped, barking forth, no smoke went up from the chimney; and, looking round, he saw that the track ended here, and that he had ridden all these miles only to find a deserted hut.

But was it deserted? Not very long so, for those two horsemen, whose tracks he had been on so long, had started from here. Here, on this bare spot in front of the door, they had mounted. One of their horses had been capering; nay, here were their footsteps on the threshold. And, while he looked, there was a light fall inside, and the chimney began smoking. "At all events," said the Doctor, "the fire's in, and here's the camp-oven, too. Somebody will be here soon. I will go in and light my pipe."

He lifted the latch, and went in. Nobody there. Stay—yes, there is a man asleep in the bed-place. "The watchman, probably," thought the Doctor, "he's been up all night with the sheep, and is taking his rest by day. Well, I won't wake him; I'll hang up my horse a bit, and

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take a pipe. Perhaps I may as well turn the horse out. Well, no. I shan't wait long ; he may stand a little without hurting himself."

So soliloquised the Doctor, and lit his pipe. A quarter hour of an passed, and the man still lay there without moving. The Doctor rose and went close to him. He could not even hear him breathe.

His flesh began to creep, but his brows contracted, and his face grew firm. He went boldly up, and pulled down the blanket, and then, to his horror and amazement, recognised the distorted countenance of the unfortunate William Lee.

He covered the face over again, and stood thinking of his situation, and how this had come to pass. How came Lee here, and how had he met his death ? At this moment something bright, half hidden by a blue shirt lying on the floor, caught his eye, and, going to pick it up, he found it was a beautiful pistol, mounted in silver, and richly chased.

He turned it over and over, till in a lozenge behind the hammer, he found, apparently scratched with a knife, the name, "G. Hawker."

Here was light with a vengeance ! But he had little time to think of his discovery, ere he was startled by the sound of horses' feet rapidly approaching the hut.

Instinctively he thrust the pistol into his pocket, and stooped down, pretending to light his pipe. He heard some one ride up to the door, dismount, and enter the hut. He at once turned round, pipe in mouth, and confronted him.

He was a tall, ill-looking, red-haired man, and to the Doctor's pleasant good morning, he replied by sulkily asking what he wanted.

"Only a light for my pipe, friend," said the Doctor ; "having got one, I will bid you good morning. Our friend here sleeps well."

The new comer was between him and the door, but the

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Doctor advanced boldly. When the two men were opposite their eyes met, and they understood one another.

Moody (for it was he) threw himself upon the Doctor with an oath, trying to bear him down ; but, although the taller man, he had met his match. He was held in a grasp of iron ; the Doctor's hand was on his collar, and his elbow against his face, and thus his head was pressed slowly backwards till he fell to avoid a broken neck, and fell, too, with such force that he lay for an instant stunned and motionless, and before he came to himself the Doctor was on horseback, and some way along the track, glad to have made so good an escape from such an awkward customer.

"If he had been armed," said the Doctor, as he rode along, "I should have been killed : he evidently came back after that pistol. Now, I wonder where I am ? I shall know soon at this pace. The little horse keeps up well, seeing he has been out all night."

In about two hours he heard a dog bark to the left of the track, and, turning off in that direction, he soon found himself in a courtyard, and before a door which he thought he recognised : the door opened at the sound of his horse, and out walked Tom Troubridge.

"Good Lord !" said the Doctor, "a friend's face at last ; tell me where I am, for I can't see the end of the house."

"Why, at our place, Toonarbin, Doctor."

"Well, take me in, and give me some food ; I have terrible tidings for you. When did you last see Lee ?"

"The day before yesterday ; he is up at an outlying hut of ours in the ranges."

"He is lying murdered in his bed there, for I saw him so not three hours past."

He then told Troubridge all that had happened.

"What sort of a man was it that attacked you ?" said Troubridge.

The Doctor described Moody.

"That's his hut-keeper, that he took from here with

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him; a man he said he knew, and you say he was on horseback. What sort of a horse had he?"

"A good-looking roan, with a new bridle on him."

"Lee's horse," said Troubridge; "he must have murdered him for it. Poor William!"

But when Tom saw the pistol and read the name on it, he said,—

"Things are coming to a crisis, Doctor; the net seems closing round my unfortunate partner. God grant the storm may come and clear the air! Anything is better than these continual alarms."

"It will be very terrible when it does come, my dear friend," said the Doctor.

"It cannot be much more terrible than this," said Tom, "when our servants are assassinated in their beds, and travellers in lonely huts have to wrestle for their lives. Doctor, did you ever nourish a passion for revenge?"

"Yes, once," said the Doctor, "and had it gratified in fair and open duel; but when I saw him lying white on the grass before me, and thought that he was dead, I was like one demented, and prayed that my life might be taken instead of his. Be sure, Tom, that revenge is of the devil, and, like everything else you get from him, is not worth having."

"I do not in the least doubt it, Doctor," said Tom; "but oh, if I could only have five minutes with him on the turf yonder, with no one to interfere between us! I want no weapon; let us meet in our shirts and trousers, like Devon lads."

"And what would you do to him?"

"If you weren't there to see, *he'd* never tell you."

"Why nourish this feeling, Tom, my old friend? you do not know what pain it gives me to see a noble open character like yours distorted like this. Leave him to Desborough,—why should you feel so deadly towards the man? He has injured others more than you."

"He stands between me and the hopes of a happy old

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age. He stands between me and the light, and he must stand on one side."

That night they brought poor Lee's body down in a dray, and buried him in the family burying-ground close beside old Miss Thornton. Then the next morning he rode back home to the Buckleys', where he found that family with myself, just arrived from the Brentwoods'. I of course was brimful of intelligence, but when the Doctor arrived I was thrown into the shade at once. However, no time was to be lost, and we despatched a messenger, post haste, to fetch back Captain Desborough and his troopers,* who had now been moved off about a week, but had not been as yet very far withdrawn, and were examining into some "black" outrages to the northward.

Mary Hawker was warned, as delicately as possible, that her husband was in the neighbourhood. She remained buried in thought for a time, and then, rousing herself, said, suddenly,—

"There must be an end to all this. Get my horse, and let me go home."

In spite of all persuasions to the contrary, she still said the same.

"Mrs. Buckley, I will go home, and see if I can meet him alone. All I ask of you is to keep Charles with you. Don't let the father and son meet, in God's name."

"But what can you do?" urged Mrs. Buckley.

"Something, at all events. Find out what he wants. Buy him off, perhaps. Pray don't argue with me. I am quite determined."

Then it became necessary to tell her of Lee's death, though the fact of his having been murdered was concealed; but it deeply affected her to hear of the loss of her old faithful servant, faithful to her at all events, whatever his faults may have been. Nevertheless, she went off alone, and took up her abode with Troubridge, and there they two sat watching in the lonely station, for him who was to come.

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Though they watched together, there was no sympathy or confidence between them. She never guessed what purpose was in Tom's heart; she never guessed what made him so pale and gloomy, or why he never stirred from the house, but slept half the day on the sofa. But ere she had been a week at home, she found out. Thus:—

They would sit, those two, silent and thoughtful, beside that unhappy hearth, watching the fire, and brooding over the past. Each had that in their hearts which made them silent to one another, and each felt the horror of some overflowing formless calamity, which any instant might take form, and overwhelm them. Mary would sit late, dreading the weary night, when her overstrained senses caught every sound in the distant forest; but, however late she sat, she always left Tom behind, over the fire, not taking his comfortable glass, but gloomily musing—as much changed from his old self as man could be.

She now lay always in her clothes, ready for any emergency; and one night, about a week after Lee's murder, she dreamt that her husband was in the hall, bidding her in a whisper which thrilled her heart, to come forth. The fancy was so strong upon her, that saying aloud to herself, "The end is come!" she arose in a state little short of delirium, and went into the hall. There was no one there, but she went to the front door, and, looking out into the profoundly black gloom of the night, said in a low voice,—

"George, George, come to me! Let me speak to you, George. It will be better for both of us to speak."

No answer: but she heard a slight noise in the sitting-room behind her, and, opening the door gently, saw a light there, and Tom sitting with parted lips watching the door, holding in his hand a cocked pistol.

She was not in the least astonished or alarmed. She was too much *tête montée* to be surprised at anything. She said only, with a laugh,—

"What! are you watching, too, old mastiff?—Would you grip the wolf, old dog, if he came?"

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"Was he there, Mary? Did you speak to him?"

"No! no!" she said. "A dream, a wandering dream. What would you do if he came,—eh, cousin?"

"Nothing! nothing!" said Tom. "Go to bed."

"Bed, eh?" she answered. "Cousin; shooting is an easier death than hanging,—eh?"

Tom felt a creeping at the roots of his hair, as he answered,—"Yes, I believe so."

"Can you shoot straight, old man? Could you shoot straight and true if he stood there before you? Ah, you think you could now, but your hand would shake when you saw him."

"Go to bed, Mary," said Tom. "Don't talk like that. Let the future lie, cousin."

She turned and went to her room again.

All this was told me long after by Tom himself. Tom believed, or said he believed, that she was only sounding him, to see what his intentions were in case of a meeting with George Hawker. I would not for the world have had him suppose I disagreed with him; but I myself take another and darker interpretation of her strange words that night. I think, that she, never a very strong-minded person, and now grown quite desperate from terror, actually contemplated her husband's death with complacency, nay, hoped, in her secret heart, that one mad struggle between him and Tom might end the matter for ever, and leave her a free woman. I may do her injustice, but I think I do not. One never knows what a woman of this kind, with strong passions and a not over-strong intellect, may be driven to. I knew her for forty years, and loved her for twenty. I knew in spite of all her selfishness and violence that there were many good, nay, noble points in her character; but I cannot disguise from myself that that night's conversation with Tom showed me a darker point in her character than I knew of before. Let us forget it. I would wish to have none but kindly recollections of the woman I loved so truly and so long.

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For the secret must be told sooner or later,—I loved her before any of them. Before James Stockbridge, before George Hawker, before Thomas Troubridge, and I loved her more deeply and more truly than any of them. But the last remnant of that love departed from my heart twenty years ago, and that is why I can write of her so calmly now, and that is the reason, too, why I remain an old bachelor to this day.

Chapter XIII

The last Gleam before the Storm

BUT with us, who were staying down at Major Buckley's, a fortnight passed on so pleasantly that the horror of poor Lee's murder had begun to wear off, and we were getting once more as merry and careless as though we were living in the old times of profound peace. Sometimes we would think of poor Mary Hawker, at her lonely watch up at the forest station; but that or any other unpleasant subject was soon driven out of our heads by Captain Desborough, who had come back with six troopers, declared the country in a state of siege, proclaimed martial law, and kept us all laughing and amused from daylight to dark.

Captain Brentwood and his daughter Alice (the transcendently beautiful!) had come up, and were staying there. Jim and his friend Halbert were still away, but were daily expected. I never passed a pleasanter time in my life than during that fortnight's lull between the storms.

"Begorra (that's a Scotch expression, Miss Brentwood, but very forcible)," said Captain Desborough. "I owe you more than I can ever repay for buying out the Donovans. That girl Lesbia Burke would have forcibly abducted me, and married me against my will, if she hadn't had to follow the rest of the family to Port Phillip."

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"A fine woman, too," said Captain Brentwood.

"I'd have called her a little coarse, myself," said Desborough.

"One of the finest, strangest sights I ever saw in my life," resumed Captain Brentwood, "was on the morning I came to take possession. None of the family were left but Murtagh Donovan and Miss Burke. I rode over from Buckley's, and when I came to the door Donovan took me by the arm, and saying 'whist,' led me into the sitting-room. There, in front of the empty fireplace, crouched down on the floor, bare-headed, with her beautiful hair hanging about her shoulders, sat Miss Burke. Every now and then she would utter the strangest low wailing cry you ever heard: a cry, by Jove, sir, that went straight to your heart. I turned to Donovan, and whispered, 'Is she ill?' and he whispered again, 'Her heart's broke at leaving the old place where she's lived so long. *She's raising the keen over the cold hearthstone.* It's the way of the Burkes.' I don't know when I was so affected in my life. Somehow, that exquisite line came to my remembrance,—

'And the hare shall kindle on the cold hearthstone,'

and I went back quietly with Donovan; and, by Jove, sir, when we came out the great ass had the tears running down his cheeks. I have always felt kindly to that man since."

"Ah, Captain," said Desborough, "with all our vanity and absurdity, we Irish have good warm hearts under our waistcoats. We are the first nation in the world, sir, saving the Jews."

This was late in the afternoon of a temperate spring day. We were watching Desborough as he was giving the finishing touches to a beautiful water-colour drawing.

"Doctor," he said, "come and pass your opinion."

"I think you have done admirably, Captain," said the Doctor; "you have given one a splendid idea of distance

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in the way you have toned down the plain, from the grey appearance it has ten miles off to the rich, delicate green it shows close to us. And your mountain, too, is most aërial. You would make an artist."

"I am not altogether displeased with my work, Doctor, if you, who never flatter, can praise it with the original before you. How exceedingly beautiful the evening tones are becoming!"

We looked across the plain; the stretch of grass I have described was lying before one like a waveless sea, from the horizon of which rose the square abrupt-sided mass of basalt which years ago we had named the Organ-hill, from the regular fluted columns of which it was composed. On most occasions, as seen from Major Buckley's, it appeared a dim mass of pearly grey, but to-night, in the clear frosty air, it was of a rich purple, shining on the most prominent angles with a dull golden light.

"The more I look at that noble fire-temple, the more I admire it," said the Doctor. It is one of the most majestic objects I ever beheld."

"It is not unlike Staffa," said Desborough. "There come two travellers."

Two dots appeared crawling over the plain, and making for the river. For a few minutes Alice could not be brought to see them, but when she did, she declared that it was Jim and Halbert.

"You have good eyes, my love," said her father, "to see what does not exist. Jim's horse is black, and Halbert's roan, and those two men are both on grey horses."

"The wish was parent to the thought, father," she replied, laughing. "I wonder what is keeping him away from us so long? If he is to go to India, I should like to see him as much as possible."

"My dear," said her father, "when he went off with Halbert to see the Markhams, I told him that if he liked to go on to Sydney, he could go if Halbert went with him, and draw on the agent for what money he wanted. By his

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being so long away, I conclude he has done so, and that he is probably at this moment getting a lesson at billiards from Halbert before going to dinner. I shall have a nice little account from the agent just now, of 'Cash advanced to J. Brentwood, Esq.'"

"I don't think Jim's extravagant, papa," said Alice.

"My dear," said Captain Brentwood, "you do him injustice. He hasn't had the chance. I must say, considering his limited opportunities, he has spent as much money on horses, saddlery, &c., as any young gentleman on this country side. Eh, Sam?"

"Well, sir," said Sam, "Jim spends his money, but he generally makes pretty good investments in the horse line."

"Such as that sweet-tempered useful animal Stampedo," replied the Captain, laughing, "who nearly killed a groom, and staked himself trying to leap out of the stock-yard the second day he had him. Well, never mind; Jim's a good boy, and I am proud of him. I am in some hopes that this Sydney journey will satisfy his wandering propensities for the present, and that we may keep him at home. I wish he would fall in love with somebody, providing she wasn't old enough to be his grandmother.—Couldn't you send him a letter of introduction to some of your old school-fellows, Miss Puss? There was one of them, I remember, I fell in love with myself one time when I came to see you; Miss Green, I think it was. She was very nearly being your mamma-in-law, my dear."

"Why, she is a year younger than me," said Alice, "and, oh goodness, such a temper! She threw the selections from Beethoven at Signor Smitherini, and had bread and water-melon for two days for it. Serve her right!"

"I have had a narrow escape, then," replied the father. "But we shall see who these two people are immediately, for they are crossing the river."

When the two travellers rose again in sight on the near bank of the river, one of them was seen galloping forward, waving his hat.

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"I *knew* it was Jim," said Alice, "and on a new grey horse. I thought he would not go to Sydney." And in a minute more she had run to meet him, and Jim was off his horse, kissing his sister, laughing, shouting, and dancing around her.

"Well, father," he said, "here I am back again. Went to Sydney and stayed a week, when we met the two Marstons, and went right up to the Clarence with them. That was a pretty journey, eh? Sold the old horse, and bought this one. I've got heaps to tell you, sister, about what I've seen. I went home, and only stayed ten minutes; when I heard you were here, I came right on."

"I am glad to see you back, Mr. Halbert," said Major Buckley; "I hope you have had a pleasant journey. You have met Captain Desborough?"

"Captain Desborough, how are you?" said Jim. "I am very glad to see you. But, between you and I, you're always a bird of ill omen. Whose pig's dead now? What brings *you* back? I thought we should be rid of you by this time."

"But you are not rid of me, Jackanapes," said Desborough, laughing. "But I'll tell you what, Jim; there is really something wrong, my boy, and I'm glad to see you back." And he told him all the news.

Jim grew very serious. "Well," said he, "I'm glad to be home again; and I'm glad, too, to see you here. One feels safer when you're in the way. We must put a cheerful face on the matter, and not frighten the women. I have bought such a beautiful brace of pistols in Sydney. I hope I may never have the chance to use them in this country. Why, there's Cecil Mayford and Mrs. Buckley coming down the garden, and Charley Hawker, too. Why, Major, you've got all the world here to welcome us."

The young men were soon busy discussing the merits of Jim's new horse, and examining with great admiration his splendid new pistols. Charley Hawker, poor boy! made a mental resolution to go to Sydney, and also come

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back with a new grey horse, and a pair of pistols more resplendent than Jim's. And then they went in to get ready for dinner.

When Jim unpacked his valise, he produced a pretty bracelet for his sister, and a stockwhip for Sam. On the latter article he was very eloquent.

"Sam, my boy," said he, "there is not such another in the country. It was made by the celebrated Bill Mossman of the Upper Hunter, the greatest swearer at bullocks, and the most accomplished whipmaker on the Sydney side. He makes only one in six months, and he makes it a favour to let you have it for five pounds. You can take a piece of bark off a blue gum, big enough for a canoe, with one cut of it. There's a fine of two pounds for cracking one within a mile of Government House, they make such a row. A man the other day cracked one of them on the South Head, and broke the windows in Pitt Street."

"You're improving, master Jim," said Charles Hawker. "You'll soon be as good a hand at a yarn as Hamlyn's Dick." At the same time he wrote down a stockwhip, similar to this one, on the tablets of his memory, to be procured on his projected visit to Sydney.

That evening we all sat listening to Jim's adventures; and pleasantly enough he told them, with not a little humorous exaggeration. It is always pleasant to hear a young fellow telling his first impressions of new things and scenes, which have been so long familiar to ourselves; but Jim had really a very good power of narration, and he kept us laughing and amused till long after the usual hour for going to bed.

Next day we had a pleasant ride, all of us, down the banks of the river. The weather was slightly frosty, and the air clear and elastic. As we followed the windings of the noble rushing stream, at a height of seldom less than three hundred feet above his bed, the Doctor was busy pointing out the alternations of primitive sandstone and

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slate, and the great streams of volcanic bluestone which had poured from various points towards the deep glen in which the river flowed. Here, he would tell us, was formerly a lofty cascade, and a lake above it, but the river had worn through the sandstone bar, drained the lake, leaving nothing of the waterfall but two lofty cliffs, and a rapid. There again had come down a lava-stream from Mirngish, which, cooled by the waters of the river, had stopped, and, accumulating, formed the lofty overhanging cliff on which we stood. He showed us how the fern-trees grew only in the still sheltered elbows facing northward, where the sun raised a warm steam from the river, and the cold south wind could not penetrate. He gathered for Mrs. Buckley a bouquet of the tender sweetscented yellow oxalis, the winter flower of Australia, and showed us the copper-lizard basking on the red rocks, so like the stone on which he lay, that one could scarce see him till a metallic gleam betrayed him, as he slipped to his lair. And we, the elder of the party, who followed the Doctor's handsome little brown mare, kept our ears open, and spoke little,—but gave ourselves fully up to the enjoyment of his learning and eloquence.

But the Doctor did not absorb the whole party; far from it. He had a rival. All the young men, and Miss Alice besides, were grouped round Captain Desborough. Frequently we elders, deep in some Old World history of the Doctor's, would be disturbed by a ringing peal of laughter from the other party, and then the Doctor would laugh, and we would all join; not that we had heard the joke, but from sheer sympathy with the hilarity of the young folks. Desborough was making himself agreeable, and who could do it better? He was telling the most outrageous of Irish stories, and making, on purpose, the most outrageous of Irish bulls. After a shout of laughter louder than the rest, the Doctor remarked,—

“That's better for them than geology,—eh, Mrs. Buckley?”

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"And so my grandmother," we heard Desborough say, "waxed mighty wrath, and she up with her gold-headed walking-stick in the middle of Sackville Street, and says she, 'Ye villain, do ye think I don't know my own Blenheim spannel when I see him?' 'Indeed, my lady,' says Mike, 'twas himself tould me he belanged to Barney.' 'Who tould you?' says she. 'The dog himself tould me, my lady.' 'Ye thief of the world,' says my aunt, 'and ye'd believe a dog before a dowager countess? Give him up, ye villain, this minute, or I'll hit ye!'"

These were the sort of stories Desborough delighted in, making them up, he often confessed, as he went on. On this occasion, when he had done his story, they all rode up and joined us, and we stood admiring the river, stretching westward in pools of gold between black cliffs, toward the setting sun; then we turned homeward.

That evening Alice said, "Now do tell me, Captain Desborough, was that a true story about Lady Covetown's dog?"

"True!" said he. "What story worth hearing ever was true? The old lady lost her dog certainly, and claimed him of a dog-stealer in Sackville Street; but all the rest, my dear young lady, is historic romance."

"Mr. Hamlyn knows a good story," said Charley Hawker, "about Bougong Jack. Do tell it to us, Uncle Jeff."

"I don't think," I said, "that it has so much foundation in fact as Captain Desborough's. But there must be some sort of truth in it, for it comes from the old hands, and shows a little more sign of imagination than you would expect from them. It is a very stupid story too."

"Do tell it," they all said. So I complied, much in the same language as I tell it now:—

You know that these great snow-ranges which tower up to the west of us are, farther south, of great breadth, and that none have yet forced their way from the country of

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the Ovens and the Mitta Mitta through here to Gipp's Land.

The settlers who have just taken up that country trying to penetrate to the eastward here towards us, find themselves stopped by a mighty granite wall. Any adventurous men, who may top that barrier, see nothing before them but range beyond range of snow Alps, intersected by precipitous cliffs, and frightful chasms.

This westward range is called the Bougongs. The blacks during summer are in the habit of coming thus far to collect and feed on the great grey moths (Bougongs) which are found on the rocks. They used to report that a fine available country lies to the east embosomed in mountains, rendered fertile by perpetual snow-fed streams. This is the more credible, as it is evident that between the Bougong range on the west and the Warragong range on the extreme east, towards us, there is a breadth of at least eighty miles.

There lived a few years ago, not very far from the Ovens-river, a curious character, by name John Sampson. He had been educated at one of the great English universities, and was a good scholar, though he had been forced to leave the university, and, as report went, England too, for some great irregularity.

He had money, and a share in his brother-in-law's station, although he never stayed there many months in the year. He was always away at some mischief or another. No horse-race or prize-fight could go on without him, and he himself never left one of these last-mentioned gatherings without finding some one to try conclusions with him. Beside this, he was a great writer and singer of comic songs, and a consummate horseman.

One fine day he came back to his brother's station in serious trouble. Whether he had mistaken another man's horse for his own or not, I cannot say ; but, at all events, he announced that a warrant was out against him for horse-stealing, and that he must go into hiding. So he

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took up his quarters at a little hut of his brother-in-law's, on the ranges, inhabited only by a stock-keeper and a black boy, and kept a young lubra in pay to watch down the glen for the police.

One morning she came running into the hut, breathless, to say that a lieutenant and three troopers were riding towards the hut. Jack had just time to saddle and mount his horse before the police caught sight of him, and started after him at full speed.

They hunted him into a narrow glen ; a single cattle-track, not a foot broad, led on between a swollen rocky creek, utterly impassable by horse or man, and a lofty precipice of loose broken slate, on which one would have thought a goat could not have found a footing. The young police lieutenant had done his work well, and sent a trooper around to head him, so that Jack found himself between the devil and the deep sea. A tall armed trooper stood in front of him, behind was the lieutenant, on the right the creek, and on the left the precipice.

They called out to him to surrender ; but, giving one look before and behind, and seeing escape was hopeless, he hesitated not a moment, but put his horse at the cliff, and clambered up, rolling down tons of loose slate in his course. The lieutenant shut his eyes, expecting to see horse and man roll down into the creek, and only opened them in time to see Jack stand for a moment on the summit against the sky, and there disappear.

He disappeared over the top of the cliff, and so he was lost to the ken of white men for the space of four years. His sister and brother-in-law mourned for him as dead, and mourned sincerely, for they and all who knew him liked him well. But at the end of that time, on a wild winter's night, he came back to them, dressed in opossum skins, with scarce a vestige of European clothing about him. His beard had grown down over his chest, and he had nearly forgotten his mother tongue, but, when speech came to him again, he told them a strange story.

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It was winter time when he rode away. All the table-lands were deep with snow ; and, when he had escaped the policemen, he had crossed the first of the great ridges on the same night. He camped in the valley he found on the other side ; and, having his gun and some ammunition with him, he fared well.

He was beyond the country which had ever been trodden by white men, and now, for the mere sake of adventure, he determined to go further still, and see if he could cross the great White Mountains, which had hitherto been considered an insurmountable barrier.

For two days he rode over a high table-land, deep in snow. Here and there, in a shallow sheltered valley, he would find just grass enough to keep his horse alive, but nothing for himself. On the third night he saw before him another snow-ridge, too far off to reach without rest, and, tethering his horse in a little crevice, between the rocks, he prepared to walk to and fro all night, to keep off the deadly snow sleepiness that he felt coming over him. " Let me but see what is beyond that next ridge," he said, " and I will lie down and die."

And now, as the stillness of the night came on, and the Southern Cross began to twinkle brilliantly above the blinding snow, he was startled once more by a sound which had fallen on his ear several times during his toilsome afternoon journey : a sound as of a sudden explosion, mingled, strangely too, with the splintering of broken glass. At first he thought it was merely the booming in his ears, or the rupture of some vessel in his bursting head. Or was it fancy ? No ; there it was again, clearer than before. That was no noise in his head, for the patient horse turned and looked toward the place where the sound came from. Thunder ? The air was clear and frosty, and not a cloud stained the sky. There was some mystery beyond that snow-ridge worth living to see.

He lived to see it. For, an hour after daybreak next

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morning. he, leading his horse, stumbled over the snow-covered rocks that bounded his view, and, when he reached the top, there burst on his sight a scene that made him throw up his arms and shout aloud.

Before him, pinnacle after pinnacle, towered up a mighty Alp, blazing in the morning sun. Down through a black rift on its side, wound a gleaming glacier, which hurled its shattered ice crystals over a dark cliff, into the deep profound blue of a lake, which stretched north and south, studded with green woody islets, almost as far as the eye could see. Toward the mountain the lake looked deep and gloomy, but, on the other side, showed many a pleasant yellow shallow, and sandy bay, while between him and the lake lay a mile or so of park-like meadow-land, in the full verdure of winter. As he looked, a vast dislocated mass of ice fell crashing from the glacier into the lake, and solved at once the mystery of the noises he had heard the night before.

He descended into the happy valley, and found a small tribe of friendly blacks, who had never before seen the face of white man, and who supposed him to be one of their own tribe, dead long ago, who had come back to them, renovated and beautified, from the other world. With these he lived a pleasant slothful life while four years went on, forgetting all the outside world, till his horse was dead, his gun rusted and thrown aside, and his European clothes long since replaced by the skin of the opossum and the koala. He had forgotten his own tongue, and had given up all thoughts of crossing again the desolate barriers of snow which divided him from civilisation, when a slight incident brought back old associations to his mind, and roused him from sleep.

In some hunting excursion he got a slight scratch and, searching for some linen to tie it up, found in his mi-mi an old waistcoat, which he had worn when he came into the valley. In the lining, while tearing it up, he found a crumpled paper, a note from his sister, written years be-

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fore, full of sisterly kindness and tenderness. He read it again and again before he laid down, and the next morning, collecting such small stock of provisions as he could, he started on the homeward track, and after incredible hardships reached his station.

His brother-in-law tried in vain with a strong party to reach the lake, but never succeeded. What mountain it was he discovered, or what river is fed by the lake he lived on, no man knows to this day. Some say he went mad, and lived in the ranges all the time, and that this was all a mere madman's fancy. But, whether he was mad or not then, he is sane enough now, and has married a wife, and settled down to be one of the most thriving men in that part of the country.*

"Well," said the Doctor, thrusting his fists deep into his breeches pockets, "I don't believe that story."

"Nor I either, Doctor," I replied. "But it has amused you all for half an hour; so let it pass."

"Oh!" said the Doctor, rather peevishly, "if you put it on those grounds, I am bound, of course, to withhold a few little criticisms I was inclined to make on its probability. I hope you won't go and pass it off as authentic, you know, because if we once begin to entertain these sort of legends as meaning anything, the whole history of the country becomes one great fog-bank, through which the devil himself could not find his way."

"Now, for my part," said mischievous Alice, "I think it a very pretty story. And I have no doubt that it is every word of it true."

"Oh, dear me, then," said the Doctor, "let us vote it true. And, while we are about it, let us believe that the Sydney ghost actually did sit on a three-rail fence, smok-

* This legend is said to be among the "Archives" of one of our best North Border families. It is but little altered, since the author heard it narrated at a camp-fire, one night, in the western Port Phillip country.

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ing its pipe, and directing an anxious crowd of relatives where to find its body. By all means let us believe everything we hear."

The next morning our pleasant party suffered a loss. Captain Brentwood and Alice went off home. He was wanted there, and all things seemed so tranquil that he thought it was foolish to stay away any longer. Cecil Mayford, too, departed, carrying with him the affectionate farewells of the whole party. His pleasant even temper, and his handsome face, had won every one who knew him and, though he never talked much, yet, when he was gone, we all missed his merry laugh, after one of Desborough's good stories. Charley Hawker went off with him, too, and spent a few hours with Ellen Mayford, much to his satisfaction, but came in again at night, as his mother had prayed of him not to leave the Major's till he had seen her again.

That night, the Major proposed punch, and, after Mrs. Buckley had gone to bed, Sam sang a song, and Desborough told a story, about a gamekeeper of his uncle's, whom the old gentleman desired to start in an independent way of business. So he built him a new house, and gave him a keg of whiskey, to start in the spirit-selling line. "But the first night," said Desborough, "the villain finished the whiskey himself, broke the keg, and burnt the house down; so my uncle had to take him back into service again after all." And after this came other stories, equally preposterous, and we went rather late to bed.

And the next morning, too, I am afraid, we were rather late for breakfast. Just as we were sitting down, in came Captain Brentwood.

"Hallo," said the Major; "what brings you back so soon, old friend. Nothing the matter, I hope?"

"Nothing but business," he replied. "I am going on to Dickson's, and I shall be back home to-night, I hope. I am glad to find you so late, as I have had no breakfast, and have ridden ten miles."

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He took breakfast with us and went on. The morning passed somewhat heavily, as a morning is apt to do, after sitting up late and drinking punch. Towards noon Desborough said,—

“ Now, if anybody will confess that he drank just three drops too much punch last night, I will do the same. Mrs. Buckley, my dear lady, I hope you will order plenty of pale ale for lunch.”

Lunch passed pleasantly enough, and afterwards the Major, telling Sam to move a table outside into the verandah, disappeared, and soon came back with a very “curious” bottle of Madeira. We sat then in the verandah smoking for about a quarter of an hour.

I remember every word that was spoken, and every trivial circumstance that happened during that quarter of an hour; they are burnt into my memory as if by fire. The Doctor was raving about English poetry, as usual, saying, however, that the modern English poets, good as they were, had lost the power of melody a good deal. This the Major denied, quoting:—

“ By torch and trumpet fast array’d.”

“ Fifty such lines, sir, are not worth one of Milton’s,” said the Doctor.

“ ‘ The trumpet spake not to the armed throng.’

There’s melody for you; there’s a blare and a clang; there’s a—”

I heard no more. Mrs. Buckley’s French clock, in the house behind, chimed three quarters past one, and I heard a sound of two persons coming quickly through the house.

Can you tell the step of him who brings evil tidings? I think I can. At all events, I felt my heart grow cold when I heard those footsteps. I heard them coming through the house, across the boarded floor. The one was a rapid, firm, military footstep, accompanied with the

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clicking of a spur, and the other was unmistakably the "pad, pad" of a blackfellow.

We all turned round and looked at the door. There stood the Sergeant of Desborough's troopers, pale and silent, and close behind him, clinging to him as if for protection, was the lithe naked figure of a black lad, looking from behind the Sergeant, with terrified visage, first at one and then at another of us.

I saw disaster in their faces, and would have held up my hand to warn him not to speak before Mrs. Buckley. But I was too late, for he had spoken. And then we sat for a minute, looking at one another, each man seeing the reflection of his own horror in his neighbour's eyes.

Chapter XIV

The Storm bursts

POOR little Cecil Mayford had left us about nine o'clock on the morning of the day before this, and accompanied by Charles Hawker, reached his mother's station about eleven o'clock in the day.

All the way Charles had talked incessantly of Ellen, and Cecil joined in Charles's praises of his sister, and joked with him for being "awfully spooney" about her.

"You're worse about my sister, Charley," said he, "than old Sam is about Miss Brentwood. He takes things quiet enough, but if you go on in this style till you are old enough to marry, by Jove, there'll be nothing of you left!"

"I wonder if she would have me?" said Charles, not heeding him.

"The best thing you can do is to ask her," said Cecil. "I think I know what she would say, though."

They reached Mrs. Mayford's, and spend a few pleasant hours together. Charles started home again about three

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o'clock, and having gone a little way, turned to look back. The brother and sister stood at the house-door still. He waved his hand in farewell to them, and they replied. Then he rode on and saw them no more.

Cecil and Ellen went into the house to their mother. The women worked, and Cecil read aloud to them. The book was "Waverley;" I saw it afterwards, and when supper was over he took it up to begin reading again.

"Not that book to-night, my boy," said his mother. "Read us a chapter out of the Bible. I am very low in my mind, and at such times I like to hear the Word."

He read the good book to them till quite late. Both he and Ellen thought it strange that their mother should insist on that book on a week-night; they never usually read it, save on Sunday evenings.

The morning broke bright and frosty. Cecil was abroad betimes, and went down the paddock to fetch the horses. He put them in the stock-yard, and stood for a time close to the stable, talking to a tame black lad, that they employed about the place.

His attention was attracted by a noise of horses' feet. He looked up and saw about a dozen men riding swiftly and silently across the paddock towards the house.

For an instant he seems to have idly wondered who they were, and have had time to notice a thickset gaudily dressed man, who rode in front of the others, when the kitchen-door was thrown suddenly open, and the old hut-keeper, with his grey hair waving in the wind, run out, crying,—“Save yourself, in God's name, Master Cecil. The Bushrangers!”

Cecil raised his clenched hands in wild despair. They were caught like birds in a trap. No hope!—no escape! Nothing left for it now, but to die red-handed. He dashed into the house with the old hut-keeper and shut the door.

The black lad ran up to a little rocky knoll within two hundred yards of the house, and, hiding himself, watched what went on. He saw the bushrangers ride up to the

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door and dismount. Then they began to beat the door and demand admittance. Then the door was burst down, and one of them fell dead by a pistol-shot. Then they rushed in tumultuously, leaving one outside to mind the horses. Then the terrified boy heard the dull sound of shots fired rapidly inside the building (pray that you may never hear that noise, reader: it always means mischief) and then all was comparatively still for a time.

Then there began to arise a wild sound of brutal riot within, and after a time they poured out again, and mounting, rode away.

Then the black boy slipt down from his lair like a snake, and stole towards the house. All was still as death. The door was open, but, poor little savage as he was, he dared not enter. Once he thought he heard a movement within, and listened intently with all his faculties, as only a savage can listen, but all was still again. And then gathering courage, he went in.

In the entrance, stepping over the body of the dead bushranger, he found the poor old white-headed hut-keeper knocked down and killed in the first rush. He went on into the parlour; and there,—oh, lamentable sight!—was Cecil; clever, handsome little Cecil, our old favourite, lying across the sofa, shot through the heart, dead.

But not alone. No; prone along the floor, covering six feet or more of ground, lay the hideous corpse of Moody, the cannibal. The red-headed miscreant, who had murdered poor Lee, under George Hawker's directions.

I think the poor black boy would have felt in his dumb darkened heart some sorrow at seeing his kind old master so cruelly murdered. Perhaps he would have raised the death-cry of his tribe over him, and burnt himself with fire, as their custom is; but he was too terrified at seeing so many of the lordly white race prostrated by one another's hands. He stood and trembled and then, almost in a whisper, began to call for Mrs. Mayford.

"Missis;" he said, "Miss Ellen! All pull away, bush-

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ranger chaps. Make a light, good Missis. Plenty frightened this fellow."

No answer. No sign of Mrs. Mayford or Ellen. They must have escaped then. We will try to hope so. The black boy peered into one chamber after another, but saw no signs of them, only the stillness of death over all.

Let us leave this accursed house, lest prying too closely, we may find crouching in some dark corner a Gorgon, who will freeze us into stone.

* * * * *

The black lad stripped himself naked as he was born, and running like a deer, sped to Major Buckley's before the south wind, across the plain. There he found the Sergeant, and told him his tale, and the Sergeant and he broke in on us with the terrible news as we were sitting merrily over our wine.

Chapter XV

Widderin shows clearly that he is worth all the Money Sam gave for him

THE Sergeant, as I said, broke in upon us with the fearful news as we sat at wine. For a minute no man spoke, but all sat silent and horror-struck. Only the Doctor rose quietly, and slipped out of the room unnoticed.

Desborough spoke first. He rose up with deadly wrath in his face, and swore a fearful oath, an oath so fearful, that he who endorsed every word of it then, will not write it down now. To the effect, "That, he would take neither meat, nor drink, nor pleasure, nor rest beyond what was necessary to keep body and soul together, before he had purged the land of these treacherous villains!"

Charles Hawker went up to the Sergeant, with a livid face and shaking hands; "Will you tell me again, Robinson, *are they all dead?*"

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The Sergeant looked at him compassionately. "Well, sir," he said; "the boy seemed to think Mrs. and Miss Mayford had escaped. But you mustn't trust what he says, sir."

"You are deceiving me," said Charles. "There is something you are hiding from me. I shall go down there this minute, and see."

"You will do nothing of the kind, sir," said Mrs. Buckley, coming into the doorway and confronting him; "your place is with Captain Desborough. I am going down to look after Ellen."

During these few moments, Sam had stood stupefied. He stepped up to the Sergeant, and said,—

"Would you tell me which way they went from the Mayfords'?"

"Down the river, sir."

"Ah!" said Sam; "towards Captain Brentwood's, and Alice at home, and alone!—There may be time yet."

He ran out of the room and I after him. "His first trouble," I thought,— "his first trial. How will our boy behave now?"

Let me mention again that the distance from the Mayfords' to Captain Brentwood's, following the windings of the river on its right bank, was nearly twenty miles. From Major Buckley's to the same point, across the plains, was barely ten; so that there was still a chance that a brave man on a good horse, might reach Captain Brentwood's before the bushrangers, in spite of the start they had got.

Sam's noble horse, Widderin, a horse with a pedigree a hundred years old, stood in the stable. The buying of that horse had been Sam's only extravagance, for which he had often reproached himself, and now this day, he would see whether he would get his money's worth out of that horse, or no.

I followed him up to the stable, and found him putting the bridle on Widderin's beautiful little head. Neither of

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us spoke, only when I handed him the saddle, and helped him with the girths, he said, "God bless you."

I ran out and got down the slip-rails for him. As he rode by he said, "Good-bye, Uncle Jeff, perhaps you won't see me again;" and I cried out, "Remember your God and your mother, Sam, and don't do anything foolish."

Then he was gone; and looking across the plains the way he should go, I saw another horseman toiling far away, and recognised Dr. Mulhaus. Good Doctor! he had seen the danger in a moment, and by his ready wit had got a start of every one else by ten minutes.

The Doctor on his handsome long-bodied Arabian mare, was making good work of it across the plains, when he heard the rush of horse's feet behind him, and turning, he saw tall Widderin bestridden by Sam, springing over the turf, gaining on him stride after stride. In a few minutes they were alongside of one another.

"Good lad!" cried the Doctor; "on, forwards; catch her, and away to the woods with her. Bloodhound Desborough will be on their trail in half-an-hour. Save her, and we will have noble vengeance."

Sam only waved his hand in good-bye, and sped on across the plain like a solitary ship at sea. He steered for a single tree, now becoming dimly visible, at the foot of the Organ hill.

The good horse, with elastic and easy motion, fled on his course like a bird; lifting his feet clearly and rapidly through the grass. The brisk south wind filled his wide nostrils as he turned his graceful neck from side to side, till, finding that work was meant, and not play, he began to hold his head straight before him, and rush steadily forward.

And Sam, poor Sam! all his hopes for life are now brought down to this: to depend on the wind and pluck of an unconscious horse. One stumble now, and it were better to lie down on the plain and die. He was in the

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hands of God, and he felt it. He said one short prayer, but that towards the end was interrupted by the wild current of his thoughts.

Was there any hope? They, the devils, would have been drinking at the Mayfords', and perhaps would go slow; or would they ride fast and wild? After thinking a short time, he feared the latter. They had tasted blood, and knew that the country would be roused on them shortly. On, on, good horse!

The lonely shepherd on the plains, sleepily watching his feeding sheep, looked up as Sam went speeding by, and thought how fine a thing it would be to be dressed like that, and have nothing to do but to ride blood-horses to death. Mind your sheep, good shepherd; perhaps it were better for you to do that and nothing more all your life, than to carry in your breast for one short hour such a volcano of rage, indignation and terror, as he does who hurries unheeding through your scattered flock.

Here are a brace of good pistols, and they, with care, shall give account, if need be, of two men. After that, nothing. It were better, so much better, not to live if one were only ten minutes too late. The Doctor would be up soon; not much matter if he were, though, only another life gone.

The Organ hill, a cloud of misty blue when he started, now hung in aerial fluted cliffs above his head. As he raced across the long glaxis which lay below the hill, he could see a solitary eagle wheeling round the topmost pinnacles, against the clear blue sky; then the hill was behind him, and before him another stretch of plain, bounded by timber, which marked the course of the river.

Brave Widderin had his ears back now, and was throwing his breath regularly through his nostrils in deep sighs. Good horse, only a little longer; bear thyself bravely this day, and then pleasant pastures for thee till thou shalt go the way of all horses. Many a time has she patted,

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with kind words, thy rainbow neck, my horse ; help us to save her now.

Alas ! good willing brute, he cannot understand ; only he knows that his kind master is on his back, and so he will run till he drop. Good Widderin ! think of the time when thy sire rushed triumphant through the shouting thousands at Epsom, and all England heard that Arcturus had won the Derby. Think of the time when thy grandam, carrying Sheik Abdullah, bore down in a whirlwind of sand on the toiling affrighted caravan. Ah ! thou knowest not of these things, but yet thy speed flags not. We are not far off now, good horse, we shall know all soon.

Now he was in the forest again, and now, as he rode quickly down the steep sandy road among the bracken, he heard the hoarse rush of the river in his ears, and knew the end was well-nigh come.

No drink now, good Widderin ! a bucket of champagne in an hour's time, if thou wilt only stay not now to bend thy neck down to the clear gleaming water ; flounder through the ford, and just twenty yards up the bank by the cherry-tree, we shall catch sight of the house, and know our fate.

Now the house was in sight, and now he cried aloud some wild inarticulate sound of thankfulness and joy. All was as peaceful as ever, and Alice, unconscious, stood white-robed in the veranda, feeding her birds.

As he rode up he shouted out to her and beckoned. She came running through the house, and met him breathless at the doorway.

"The bushrangers ! Alice, my love," he said. "We must fly this instant, they are close to us now."

She had been prepared for this. She knew her duty well, for her father had often told her what to do. No tears ! no hysterics ! She took Sam's hand without a word, and placing her fairy foot upon his boot, vaulted up into the saddle before him, crying,—*"Eleanor, Eleanor !"*

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Eleanor, the cook, came running out. "Fly!" said Alice. "Get away into the bush. The gang are coming; close by." She, an old Vandemonian, needed no second warning, and as the two young people rode away, they saw her clearing the paddock rapidly, and making for a dense clump of wattles, which grew just beyond the fence.

"Whither now, Sam?" said Alice, the moment they were started.

"I should feel safer across the river," he replied; "that little wooded knoll would be a fine hiding-place, and they will come down this side of the river from Mayford's."

"From Mayford's! why, have they been there?"

"They have, indeed. Alas! poor Cecil."

"What has happened to him? nothing serious?"

"Dead! my love, dead."

"Oh! poor little Cecil," she cried, "that we were all so fond of. And Mrs. Mayford and Ellen?"

"They have escaped!—they are not to be found—they have hidden away somewhere."

They crossed the river, and dismounting, they led the tired horse up the steep slope of turf that surrounded a little castellated tor of bluestone. Here they would hide till the storm was gone by, for from here they could see the windings of the river, and all the broad plain stretched out beneath their feet.

"I do not see them anywhere, Alice," said Sam presently. "I see no one coming across the plains. They must be either very near us in the hollow of the river-valley, or else a long way off. I have very little doubt they will come here, though, sooner or later."

"There they are!" said Alice. "Surely there are a large party of horsemen on the plains, but they are seven or eight miles off."

"Ay, ten," said Sam. "I am not sure they are horsemen." Then he said suddenly in a whisper, "Lie down, my love, in God's name! Here they are, close to us!"

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There burst on his ear a confused sound of talking and laughing, and out of one of the rocky gullies leading towards the river, came the men they had been flying from, in number about fourteen. They had crossed the river, for some unknown reason, and to the fear-struck hidiers it seemed as though they were making straight towards their lair.

He had got Widderin's head in his breast, blindfolding him with his coat, for should he neigh now, they were undone, indeed! As the bushrangers approached, the horse began to get uneasy, and paw the ground, putting Sam in such an agony of terror that the sweat rolled down his face. In the midst of this he felt a hand on his arm, and Alice's voice, which he scarcely recognised, said, in a fierce whisper,—

“Give me one of your pistols, sir!”

“Leave that to me!” he replied in the same tone.

“As you please,” she said; “but I must not fall alive into their hands. Never look your mother in the face again if I do.”

He gave one more glance round, and saw that the enemy would come within a hundred yards of their hiding-place. Then he held the horse faster than ever, and shut his eyes.

* * * * *

Was it a minute only, or an hour, till they heard the sound of the voices dying away in the roar of the river; and, opening their eyes once more, looked into one another's faces?

Faces, they thought, that they had never seen before,—so each told the other afterwards,—so wild, so haggard, and so strange! And now that they were safe and free again—free to arise and leave their dreadful rock prison, and wander away where they would, they could scarcely believe that the danger was past.

They came out silently from among the crags, and took up another station, where they could see all that went on.

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They saw the miscreants swarming about the house, and heard a pistol-shot—only one.

“Who can they be firing at?” said Alice, in a subdued tone. They were both so utterly appalled by their late danger, that they spoke in whispers, though the enemy were a quarter of a mile off.

“Mere mischief, I should fancy,” said Sam; “there is no one there. Oh! Alice, my love, can you realise that we are safe?”

“Hardly yet, Sam! But who could those men be we saw at such a distance on the plain? Could they have been cattle? I am seldom deceived, you know; I can see an immense distance.”

“Why,” said Sam, “I had forgotten them! They must be our friends, on these fellows’ tracks. Desborough would not be long starting, I know.”

“I hope my father,” said Alice, “will hear nothing till he sees me. Poor father! what a state he will be in. See, there is a horseman close to us. It is the Doctor!”

They saw Dr. Mulhaus ride up to one of the heights overlooking the river, and reconnoitre. Seeing the men in the house, he began riding down towards them.

“He will be lost!” said Alice. “He thinks we are there. Co’ee, Sam, at all risks.”

Sam did so, and they saw the Doctor turn. Alice showed herself for a moment, and then he turned back, and rode the way he had come. In a few minutes he joined them from the rear, and, taking Alice in his arms, kissed her heartily.

“So our jewel is safe, then—praise be to God! Thanks due also to a brave man and a good horse. This is the last station those devils will ruin, for our friends are barely four miles off. I saw them just now.”

“I wish, I only wish,” said Sam, “that they may delay long enough to be caught. I would give a good deal for that.”

There was but little chance of that though; their meas-

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ures were too well taken. Almost as Sam spoke, the three listeners heard a shrill whistle, and immediately the enemy began mounting. Some of them were evidently drunk, and could hardly get on their horses, but were assisted by the others. But very shortly they were all clear off, heading to the north-west.

"Now we may go down, and see what destruction has been done," said Alice. "Who would have thought to see such times as these!"

"Stay a little," said the Doctor, "and let us watch these gentlemen's motions. Where can they be going nor'-west—straight on to the mountains?"

"I am of opinion," said Sam, "that they are going to lie up in one of the gullies this evening. They are full of drink and madness, and they don't know what they are about. If they get into the main system of gullies, we shall have them like rats in a trap, for they can never get out by the lower end. Do you see, Doctor, a little patch of white road among the trees over there? That leads to the Limestone Gates, as we call it. If they pass those walls upwards, they are confined as in a pound. Watch the white road, and we shall see."

The piece of road alluded to was about two miles off, and winding round a steep hill among trees. Only one turn in it was visible, and over this, as they watched, they saw a dark spot pass, followed by a crowd of others.

"There they go," said Sam. "The madmen are safe now. See, there comes Desborough, and all of them; let us go down."

They turned to go, and saw Jim coming towards them, by the route that Sam had come, all bespattered with clay, limping and leading his new grey horse, dead lame.

He threw up his hat when he saw them, and gave a feeble hurrah! but even then a twinge of pain shot across his face, and, when he was close, they saw he was badly hurt.

"God save you, my dear sister," he said; "I have been

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in such a state of mind ; God forgive me, I have been cursing the day I was born. Sam, I started about three minutes after you, and had very nearly succeeded in overhauling the Doctor, about two miles from here, when this brute put his foot in a crab hole, and came down, rolling on my leg. I was so bruised I couldn't mount again, and so I have walked. I see you are all right though, and that is enough for me. Oh, my sister—my darling Alice ! Think what we have escaped ! ”

So they went towards the house. And when Major Buckley caught sight of Alice, riding between Dr. Mulhaus and Sam, he gave such a stentorian cheer that the retreating bushrangers must have heard it.

“ Well ridden, gentlemen,” he said. “ And who won the race ? Was it Widderin, or the Arabian, or the nondescript Sydney importation ? ”

“ The Sydney importation, sir, would have beaten the Arabian, barring accident,” said Jim. “ But, seriously speaking, I should have been far too late to be of any service.”

“ And I,” said the Doctor, “ also. Sam won the race, and has got the prize. Now, let us look forward, and not backward.”

They communicated to Desborough all particulars, and told him of the way they had seen the bushrangers go. Every one was struck with the change in him. No merry stories now. The laughing Irishman was gone, and a stern gloomy man, more like an Englishman, stood in his place. I heard after, that he deeply blamed himself for what had occurred (though no one else thought of doing so), and thought he had not taken full precautions. On the present occasion he said,—

“ Well, gentlemen, night is closing in. Major Buckley, I think you will agree with me that we should act more effectually if we waited till daylight, and refresh both horses and men. More particularly as the enemy in their drunken madness have hampered themselves in the moun-

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tains. Major, Doctor Mulhaus, and Mr. Halbert, you are military men—what do you say ? ”

They agreed that there was no doubt. It would be much the best plan.

“ I would sooner he'd have gone to-night and got it over,” said Charles Hawker, taking Sam's arm. “ Oh ! Sam, Sam ! Think of poor Cecil ! Think of poor Ellen, when she hears what has happened. She must know by now ! ”

“ Poor Charley,” said Sam, “ I am so sorry for you ! Lie down, and get to sleep ; the sun is going down.”

He lay down as he was bid, somewhere out of the way. He was crushed and stunned. He hardly seemed to know at present what he was doing. After a time, Sam went in and found him sleeping uneasily.

But Alice was in sad tribulation at the mischief done. All her pretty little womanly ornaments overturned and broken, her piano battered to pieces, and, worst of all, her poor kangaroo shot dead, lying in the veranda. “ Oh ! ” said she to Major Buckley, “ you must think me very wicked to think of such things at a time like this, but I cannot help it. There is something so shocking to me in such a sudden *bouleversement* of old order. Yet, if it shocks me to see my piano broken, how terrible must a visitation like the Mayfords' be ! These are not the times for moralizing, however. I must see about entertaining the garrison.”

Eleanor, the cook, had come back from her lair quite unconcerned. She informed the company, in a nonchalant sort of way, that this was the third adventure of the kind she had been engaged in, and, that although they seemed to make a great fuss about it, on the other side (Van Diemen's Land), it was considered a mere necessary nuisance ; and so proceeded to prepare such supper as she could. In the same off-hand way she remarked to Sam, when he went into the kitchen to get a light for his pipe, that, if it was true that Mike Howe had crossed and was

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among them, they had better look out for squalls ; for that he was a devil, and no mistake.

Desborough determined to set a watch out on the road towards the mouth of the gully, where they were supposed to be. "We shall have them in the morning," said he. "Let every one get to sleep who can sleep, for I expect every one to follow me to-morrow."

Charles Hawker had lain down in an inner room, and was sleeping uneasily, when he was awakened by some one, and, looking up, saw Major Buckley, with a light in his hand, bending over him. He started up.

"What is the matter, sir?" he asked. "Why do you look at me so strangely? Is there any new misfortune?"

"Charles," said the Major, "you have no older friend than me."

"I know it, sir. What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to stay at home to-morrow."

"Anything but that, sir. They will call me a coward."

"No one shall do so. I swear that he who calls you a coward shall feel the weight of my arm."

"Why am I not to go with them? Why am I to be separated from the others?"

"You must not ask," said the Major; "perhaps you will know some day, but not yet. All I say to you is, go home to your mother to-morrow, and stay there. Should you fire a shot, or strike a blow against those men we are going to hunt down, you may do a deed which would separate you from the rest of mankind, and leave you to drag on a miserable guilty life. Do you promise?"

"I will promise," said Charles; "but I wonder——"

"Never mind wondering. Good night."

The troopers lay in the hall, and in the middle of the night there was a sound of a horse outside, and he who was the nearest the door got up and went out.

"Who is there?" said the voice of Captain Brentwood.

"Jackson, sir."

"My house has been stuck up, has it not?"

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"Yes, sir."

"And my daughter?"

"Safe, sir. Young Mr. Buckley rode over and caught her up out of it ten minutes before they got here."

"Long life to him, and glory to God. Who is here?"

The trooper enumerated them.

"And what has become of the gang?" asked the Captain.

"Gone into the limestone gully, sir. Safe for to-morrow."

"Ah, well, I shall come in and lie in the hall. Don't make a noise. What is that?"

They both started. Some one of the many sleepers, with that strange hoarse voice peculiar to those who talk in their dreams, said, with singular energy and distinctness,—

"I will go, sir; they will call me coward."

"That's young Mr. Hawker, sir," said the trooper. "His sweetheart's brother, Mr. Mayford, was killed by them yesterday. The head of this very gang, sir, that villain Touan—his name is Hawker. An odd coincidence, sir."

"Very odd," said the Captain. "At the same time, Jackson, if I were you, I wouldn't talk about it. There are many things one had best not talk about, Jackson. Pull out the corner of that blanket, will you? So we shall have some fun to-morrow, up in the pass, I'm thinking."

"They'll fight, sir," said the trooper. "If we can bail them up, they'll fight, believe me. Better so; I think we shall save the hangman some trouble. Good night, sir."

So Captain Brentwood lay down beside the trooper, and slept the sleep of the just among his broken chairs and tables. The others slept too, sound and quiet, as though there were no fight on the morrow.

But ere the moon grew pale they were woke by Desborough, tramping about with clicking spurs among the

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sleepers, and giving orders in a loud voice. At the first movement, while the rest were yawning and stretching themselves, and thinking that battle was not altogether so desirable a thing on a cold morning as it was overnight, Major Buckley was by Charles Hawker's bedside, and, reminding him of his promise, got him out unperceived, helped him to saddle his horse, and started him off to his mother with a note.

The lad, overawed by the Major's serious manner, went without debate, putting the note in his pocket. I have seen that note; Sam showed it to me the next day, and so I can give you the contents. It was from Major Buckley to Mary Hawker, and ran thus:—

“I have sent your boy to you, dear old friend, bearing this. You will have heard by now what has happened, and you will give me credit for preventing what might come to be a terrible catastrophe. The boy is utterly unconscious that his own father is the man whose life is sought this day above all others. He is at the head of this gang, Mary. My own son saw him yesterday. My hand shall not be raised against him; but further than that I will not interfere. Your troubles have come now to the final and most terrible pass; and all the advice I have to give you is to pray, and pray continually, till this awful storm is gone by. Remember, that come what may, you have two friends entirely devoted to you—my wife and myself.”

Hurriedly written, scrawled rather as this note was, it showed me again plainer than ever what a noble clear-hearted man he was who had written it. But this is not to the purpose. Charles Hawker departed, carrying this, before the others were stirring, and held his way through the forest-road towards his mother's station.

This same two days' business was the best stroke of work that the Devil did in that part of the country for many years. With his usual sagacity he had busied him-

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self in drawing the threads of mischief so parallel, that it seemed they must end in one and only one lamentable issue ; namely, that Charles Hawker and his father should meet, pistol in hand, as deadly enemies. But at this last period of the game, our good honest Major completely check-mated him, by sending Charles Hawker home to his mother. In this terrible pass, after this unexpected move of the Major's, he (the Devil, no other) began casting about for a scoundrel, by whose assistance he might turn the Major's flank. But no great rogue being forthcoming he had to look round for the next best substitute, a great fool,—and one of these he found immediately, riding exactly the way he wished. Him he subpœnaed immediately, and found to do his work better even than a good rogue would have done. We shall see how poor Charles Hawker, pricking along through the forest, getting every moment further from danger and mischief, met a man charging along the road, full speed, who instantly pulled up and spoke to him.

This was the consummate fool, sent of the Devil, whom I have mentioned above. We have seen him before. He was the longest, brownest, stupidest of the Hawbuck family. The one who could spit further than any of his brothers.

“Well, Charley,” he said, “is this all true about the bushrangers ? ”

Charles said it was. And they were bailed up in the limestone gully, and all the party were away after them.

“Where are you going then ? ” asked the unfortunate young idiot.

“Home to my mother,” blurted out poor Charles.

“Well ! ” said the other, speaking unconsciously exactly the words which the enemy of mankind desired. “Well, I couldn't have believed that. If a chap had said that of you in my hearing, I'd have fought him if he'd been as big as a house. I never thought that of you, Charley.”

Charles cursed aloud. “What have I done to be talked

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to like this? Major Buckley has no right to send me away like this, to be branded as coward through the country side. Ten times over better to be shot than have such words as these said to me. I shall go back with you."

"That's the talk," said the poor fool. "I thought I wasn't wrong in you, Charley." And so Charles galloped back with him.

We, in the meantime, had started from the station, ere day was well broke. Foremost of the company rode Desborough, calm and serene, and on either side of him Captain Brentwood and Major Buckley. Then came the Doctor, Sam, Jim, Halbert, and myself; behind us again, five troopers and the Sergeant. Each man of us all was armed with a sword; and every man in that company, as it happened, knew the use of that weapon well. The troopers carried carbines, and all of us carried pistols.

The glare in the east changing from pearly green to golden yellow, gave notice of the coming sun. One snow peak, Tambo I think, began to catch the light, and blaze like another morning star. The day had begun in earnest, and, as we entered the mouth of the glen to which we were bound, slanting gleams of light were already piercing the misty gloom, and lighting up the loftier crags.

A deep, rock-walled glen it was, open and level; though, in the centre, ran a tangled waving line of evergreen shrubs, marking the course of a pretty bright creek, which, half-hidden by luxuriant vegetation, ran beside the faint track leading to one of Captain Brentwood's mountain huts. Along this track we could plainly see the hoof marks of the men we were after.

It was one of the most beautiful gullies I had ever seen, and I turned to say so to some one who rode beside me. Conceive my horror at finding it was Charles Hawker! I turned to him fiercely, and said,—

"Get back, Charles. Go home. You don't know what you are doing, lad."

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He defied me. And I was speaking roughly to him again, when there came a puff of smoke from among the rocks overhead, and down I went, head over heels. A bullet had grazed my thigh, and killed my horse, who, throwing me on my head, rendered me *hors de combat*. So that during the fight which followed, I was sitting on a rock, very sick and very stupid, a mile from the scene of action.

My catastrophe caused only a temporary stoppage; and, during the confusion, Charles Hawker was unnoticed. The man who had fired at me (why at me I cannot divine), was evidently a solitary guard perched among the rocks. The others held on for about a quarter of an hour, till the valley narrowed up again, just leaving room for the track, between the brawling creek and the tall limestone cliff. But after this it opened out into a broader amphitheatre, walled on all sides by inaccessible rock, save in two places. Sam, from whom I got this account of affairs, had just time to notice this, when he saw Captain Brentwood draw a pistol and fire it, and, at the same instant, a man dashed out of some scrub on the other side of the creek, and galloped away up the valley.

"They have had the precaution to set two watches for us, which I hardly expected," said Captain Desborough. "They will fight us now, they can't help it, thank God. They have had a sharp turn and a merry one, but they are dead men, and they know it. The Devil is but a poor paymaster, Buckley. After all this hide and seek work, they have only got two days' liberty."

The troopers now went to the front with Halbert and the other military men, while Sam, Jim, and Charles, the last all unperceived by the Major in his excitement, rode in the rear.

"We are going to have a regular battle," said Jim. "They are bailed up, and must fight: some of us will go home feet foremost to-day."

So they rode on through the open forest, till they began

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to see one or two horsemen through the tree-stems, reconnoitring. The ground began to rise towards a lofty cliff that towered before them, and all could see that the end was coming. Then they caught sight of the whole gang scattered about among the low shrubs, and a few shots were fired on both sides, before the enemy turned and retreated towards the wall of rock, now plainly visible through the timber. Our party continued to advance steadily in open order.

Then under the beetling crags, where the fern-trees began to feather up among the fallen boulders, the bushrangers turned like hunted wolves, and stood at bay.

Chapter XVI

The Fight among the Fern-Trees

THEN Captain Desborough cried aloud to ride at them, and spare no man. And, as he spoke, every golden fern-bough, and every coigne of vantage among the rocks, began to blaze and crackle with gun and pistol shot. Jim's horse sprung aloft and fell, hurling him forcibly to the ground, and a tall young trooper, dropping his carbine, rolled heavily off his saddle, and lay on the grass face downward, quite still, as if asleep.

"There's the first man killed," said the Major, very quietly. "Sam, my boy, don't get excited, but close on the first fellow you see a chance at." And Sam, looking in his father's face as he spoke, saw a light in his eyes, that he had never seen there before—the light of battle. The Major caught a carbine from the hands of a trooper who rode beside him, and took a snap-shot, quick as lightning, at a man whom they saw running from one covert to another. The poor wretch staggered and put his hands to his head, then stumbled and fell heavily down.

Now the fight became general and confused. All about

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among the fern and the flowers, among the lemon-shrubs, and the tangled vines, men fought, and fired, and struck, and cursed; while the little brown bandicoots scudded swiftly away, and the deadly snake hid himself in his darkest lair, affrighted. Shots were cracking on all sides, two riderless horses, confused in the *mêlée*, were galloping about neighing, and a third lay squealing on the ground in the agonies of death.

Sam saw a man fire at his father, whose horse went down, while the Major arose unhurt. He rode at the ruffian, who was dismounted, and cut him so deep between the shoulder and the neck, that he fell and never spoke again. Then seeing Halbert and the Doctor on the right, fiercely engaged with four men who were fighting with clubbed muskets and knives, he turned to help them, but ere he reached them, a tall, handsome young fellow dashed out of the shrub, and pulling his horse short up, took deliberate aim at him, and fired.

Sam heard the bullet go hissing past his ear, and got mad. "That young dog shall go down," said he. "I know him. He is one of the two who rode first yesterday." And as this passed through his mind, he rode straight at him, with his sword hand upon his left shoulder. He came full against him in a moment, and as the man held up his gun to guard himself, his cut descended, so full and hard, that it shore through the gunbarrel as through a stick,* and ere he could bring his hand to his cheek, his opponent had grappled him, and the two rolled off their horses together, locked in a deadly embrace.

Then began an awful and deadly fight between these two young fellows. Sam's sword had gone from his hand in the fall, and he was defenceless, save by such splendid physical powers as he had by nature. But his adversary, though perhaps a little lighter, was a terrible enemy, and fought with the strength and litheness of a leopard. He

* Lieutenant Anderson, unless I am mistaken, performed the same feat at the capture of a bushranger in '52.

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had his hand at Sam's throat, and was trying to choke him. Sam saw that one great effort was necessary, and with a heave of his whole body, threw the other beneath him, and struck downwards, three quick blows, with the whole strength of his ponderous fist, on the face of the man, as he lay beneath him. The hold on his throat loosened, and seeing that they had rolled within reach of his sword, in a moment he had clutched it, and drawing back his elbow, prepared to plunge it into his adversary's chest.

But he hesitated. He could not do it. Maddened as he was with fighting, the sight of that bloody face, bruised beyond recognition by his terrible blows, and the wild fierce eyes, full of rage and terror, looking into his own, stayed his hand, and while he paused the man spoke, thick and indistinctly, for his jaw was broken.

"If you will spare me," he said, "I will be King's evidence."

"Then turn on your face," said Sam; "and I will tie you up."

And as he spoke a trooper ran up, and secured the prisoner, who appealed to Sam for his handkerchief. "I fought you fair," he said; "and you're a man worth fighting. But you have broken something in my face with your fist. Give me something to tie it up with."

"God save us all!" said Sam, giving him his handkerchief. "This is miserable work! I hope it is all over."

It seemed so. All he heard were the fearful screams of a wounded man lying somewhere among the fern.

"Where are they all, Jackson?" said he.

"All away to the right, sir," said the trooper. "One of my comrades is killed, your father has had his horse shot, the Doctor is hit in the arm, and Mr. James Brentwood has got his leg broke with the fall of his horse. They are minding him now. We've got all the gang, alive or dead, except two. Captain Desborough is up the valley now after the head man, and young Mr. Hawker is with him. D——n it all! hark to that!"

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Two shots were fired in quick succession in the direction indicated ; and Sam, having caught his horse, galloped off to see what was going on.

* * * * *

Desborough fought neither against small nor great, but only against one man, and he was George Hawker. Him he had sworn he would bring home, dead or alive. When he and his party had first broken through the fern, he had caught sight of his quarry, and had instantly made towards him, as quick as the broken scrub-tangled ground would allow.

They knew one another ; and, as soon as Hawker saw that he was recognised, he made to the left, away from the rest of his gang, trying to reach, as Desborough could plainly see, the only practicable way that led from the amphitheatre in which they were back into the mountains.

They fired at one another without effect at the first. Hawker was now pushing in full flight, though the scrub was so dense that neither made much way. Now the ground got more open and easier travelled, when Desborough was aware of one who came charging recklessly up alongside of him, and looking round, he recognised Charles Hawker.

“ Good lad,” he said ; “ come on. I must have that fellow before us there. He is the arch-devil of the lot. If we follow him to hell, we must have him ! ”

“ We'll have him safe enough ! ” said Charles. “ Push to the left, Captain, and we shall get him against those fallen rocks.”

Desborough saw the excellence of this advice. This was the last piece of broken ground there was. On the right the cliff rose precipitous, and from its side had tumbled a confused heap of broken rock, running out into the glen. Once past this, the man they were pursuing would have the advantage, for he was splendidly mounted, and beyond was clear galloping ground. As it was, he was

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in a recess, and Desborough and Charles pushing forward, succeeded in bringing him to bay. Alas, too well!

George Hawker reined up his horse when he saw escape was impossible, and awaited their coming with a double-barrelled pistol in his hand. As the other two came on, calling on him to surrender, Desborough's horse received a bullet in his chest, and down went horse and man together. But Charles pushed on till he was within ten yards of the bushranger, and levelled his pistol to fire.

So met father and son, the second time in their lives, all unconsciously. For an instant they glared on one another with wild threatening eyes, as the father made his aim more certain and deadly. Was there no lightning in heaven to strike him dead, and save him from this last horrid crime? Was there no warning voice to tell him that this was his son?

None. The bullet sped, and the poor boy tumbled from his saddle, clutching wildly, with crooked, convulsive fingers, at the grass and flowers—shot through the chest!

Then, ere Desborough had disentangled himself from his fallen horse, George Hawker rode off laughing—out through the upper rock walls into the presence of the broad bald snow-line that rolled above his head in endless lofty tiers towards the sky.

Desborough arose, swearing and stamping: but, ere he could pick up his cap, Sam was alongside of him, breathless, and with him another common-looking man—my man, Dick, no other—and they both cried out together, "What has happened?"

"Look there!" said Desborough, pointing to something dark among the grass,— "that's what has happened. What lies there was Charles Hawker, and the villain is off."

"Who shot Charles Hawker?" said Dick.

"His namesake," said Desborough.

"His own father!" said Dick; "that's terrible."

"What do you mean?" they both asked aghast.

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"Never mind now," he answered. "Captain Desborough, what are you going to do? Do you know where he's gone?"

"Up into the mountain, to lie by, I suppose," said Desborough.

"Not at all, sir! He is going to cross the snow, and get to the old hut, near the Murray Gate."

"What! Merryman's hut?" said the Captain. "Impossible! He could not get through that way."

"I tell you he can. That is where they came from at first; that is where they went to when they landed; and this is the gully they came through."

"Are you deceiving me?" said Desborough. "It will be worse for you if you are! I ain't in a humour for that sort of thing. Who are you?"

"I am Mr. Hamlyn's groom—Dick. Strike me dead if I ain't telling the truth!"

"Do you know this man, Buckley!" said Desborough, calling out to Sam, who was sitting beside poor Charles Hawker, holding his head up.

"Know him! of course I do," he replied; "ever since I was a child."

"Then, look here," said Desborough to Dick, "I shall trust you. Now, you say he will cross the snow. If I were to go round by the Parson's I shouldn't get much snow."

"That's just it, don't you see? You can be round at the huts before him. That's what I mean," said Dick. "Take Mr. Buckley's horse, and ride him till he drops, and you'll get another at the Parson's. If you have any snow, it will be on Broadsaddle; but it won't signify. You go round the low side of Tambo, and sight the lake, and you'll be there before him."

"How far?"

"Sixty miles, or thereabouts, plain sailing. It ain't eleven o'clock yet."

"Good; I'll remember you for this. Buckley, I want your horse. Is the lad dead?"

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"No; but he is very bad. I'll try to get him home. Take the horse; he is not so good a one as Widderin, but he'll carry you to the Parson's. God speed you."

They watched him ride away almost south, skirting the ridges of the mountain as long as he could; then they saw him scrambling up a lofty wooded ridge, and there he disappeared.

They raised poor Charles Hawker up, and Sam, mounting Dick's horse, took the wounded man up before him, and started to go slowly home. After a time, he said, "Do you feel worse, Charles?" and the other replied, "No; but I am very cold." After that, he stayed quite still, with his arm round Sam Buckley's neck, until they reached the Brentwoods' door.

Some came out to the door to meet them, and, among others, Alice. "Take him from me," said Sam to one of the men. "Be very gentle; he is asleep." And so they took the dead man's arm from off the living man's shoulder, and carried him in; for Charles Hawker was asleep indeed—in the sleep that knows no waking.

* * * * *

That was one of the fiercest and firmest stands that was ever made by bushrangers against the authorities. Of the former five were shot down, three wounded, and the rest captured, save two. The gang was destroyed at once, and life and property once more secure, though at a sad sacrifice.

One trooper was shot dead at the first onset,—a fine young fellow, just picked from his regiment for good conduct to join the police. Another was desperately wounded, who died the next day. On the part of the independent men assisting, there were Charles Hawker killed, Dr. Mulhaus shot in the left arm, and Jim with his leg broke; so that, on that evening, Captain Brentwood's house was like a hospital.

Captain Brentwood set his son's leg, under Dr. Mulhaus' directions, the Doctor keeping mighty brave, though

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once or twice his face twisted with pain, and he was nearly fainting. Alice was everywhere, pale and calm, helping every one who needed it, and saying nothing. Eleanor, the cook, pervaded the house, doing the work of seven women, and having the sympathies of fourteen. She told them that this was as bad a job as she'd ever seen; worse, in fact. That the nearest thing she'd ever seen to it was when Mat Steeman's mob were broke up by the squatters; "but then," she added, "there were none but prisoners killed."

But when Alice had done all she could, and the house was quiet, she went up to her father, and said,—

"Now, father, comes the worst part of the matter for me. Who is to tell Mrs. Hawker?"

"Mrs. Buckley, my dear, would be the best person. But she is at the Mayfords', I am afraid."

"Mrs. Hawker must be told at once, father, by some of us. I do so dread her hearing of it by some accident, when none of her friends are with her. Oh, dear! oh, dear! I never thought to have had such times as these."

"Alice, my darling," said her father, "do you think that you have strength to carry the news to her? If Major Buckley went with you, he could tell her, you know; and it would be much better for her to have him, an old friend, beside her. It would be such a delay to go round and fetch his wife. Have you courage?"

"I will make courage," she said. "Speak to Major Buckley, father, and I will get ready."

She went to Sam. "I am going on a terrible errand," she said; "I am going to tell Mrs. Hawker about this dreadful, dreadful business. Now, what I want to say is, that you mustn't come; your father is going with me, and I'll get through it alone, Sam. Now please," she added, seeing Sam was going to speak, "don't argue about it; I am very much upset as it is, and I want you to stay here. You won't follow us, will you?"

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"Whatever you order, Alice, is law," said Sam. "I won't come if you don't wish it; but I can't see——"

"There now. Will you get me my horse? And please stay by poor Jim, for my sake."

Sam complied; and Alice, getting on her riding-habit, came back trembling, and trying not to cry, to tell Major Buckley that she was ready.

He took her in his arms, and kissed her. "You are a brave, noble girl," he said; "I thank God for such a daughter-in-law. Now, my dear, let us hurry off, and not think of what is to come."

It was about five o'clock when they went off. Sam and Halbert, having let them out of the paddock, went in-doors to comfort poor Jim's heart, and to get something to eat, if it were procurable. Jim lay on his bed tossing about, and the Doctor sat beside him, talking to him, pale and grim, waiting for the doctor who had been sent for; no other than his drunken old enemy.

"This is about as nice a kettle of fish," said Jim, when they came and sat beside him, "as a man could possibly wish to eat. Poor Cecil and Charley; both gone, eh? Well, I know it ain't decent for a fellow with a broken leg to feel wicked; but I do, nevertheless. I wish now that I had had a chance at some of them before that stupid brute of a horse got shot."

"If you don't lie still, you Jim," said Sam, "your leg will never set; and then you must have it taken off, you know. How is your arm, Doctor?"

"Shooting a little," said the Doctor; "nothing to signify, I believe. At least, nothing in the midst of such a tragedy as this. Poor Mary Hawker; the pretty little village-maid we all loved so well. To come to such an end as this!"

"Is it true, then, Doctor, that Hawker, the bushranger, is her husband?"

"Quite true, alas! Every one must know it now. But I pray you, Sam, to keep the darkest part of it all from

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her ; don't let her know that the boy fell by the hand of his father."

"I could almost swear," said Sam, "that one among the gang is his son too. When they rode past Alice and myself yesterday morning, one was beside him so wonderfully like him, that even at that time I set them down for father and son."

"If Hamlyn's strange tale be true, it is so," said the Doctor. "Is the young man you speak of among the prisoners, do you know?"

"Yes ; I helped to capture him myself," said Sam. "What do you mean by Hamlyn's story?"

"Oh, a long one. He met him in a hut the night after we picnic'd at Mirngish, and found out who he was. The secret not being ours, your father and I never told any of you young people of the fact of this bushranger being poor Mrs. Hawker's husband. I wish we had ; all this might have been avoided. But the poor soul always desired that the secret of his birth might be kept from Charles, and you see the consequence. I'll never keep a secret again. Come here with me ; let us see both of them."

They followed him, and he turned into a little side room at the back of the house. It was a room used for chance visitors or strangers, containing two small beds, which now bore an unaccustomed burden, for beneath the snow-white coverlets lay two figures, indistinct indeed, but unmistakable.

"Which is he?" whispered the Doctor.

Sam raised the counterpane from the nearest one, but it was not Charles. It was a young, handsome face that he saw, lying so quietly and peacefully on the white pillow, that he exclaimed—

"Surely this man is not dead!"

The Doctor shook his head. "I have often seen them like that," he said. "He is shot through the heart."

Then they went to the other bed, where poor Charles lay. Sam gently raised the black curls from his face, but

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none of them spoke a word for a few minutes, till the Doctor said, "Now let us come and see his brother."

They crossed the yard, to a slab outbuilding, before which one of the troopers was keeping guard, with a loaded carbine; and, the Sergeant coming across, admitted them.

Seven or eight fearfully ill-looking ruffians lay about on the floor, handcuffed. They were most of them of the usual convict stamp; dark, saturnine-looking fellows, though one offered a strange contrast by being an Albino, and another they could not see plainly, for he was huddled up in a dark corner, bending down over a basin of water, and dabbing his face. The greater part of them cursed and blasphemed desperately, as is the manner of such men when their blood is up, and they are reckless; while the wounded ones lay in a fierce sullen silence, more terrible almost than the foul language of the others.

"He is not here," said Sam. "Stay, that must be him wiping his face."

He went towards him, and saw he was right. The young man he had taken looked wildly up like a trapped animal into his face, and the Doctor could not suppress an exclamation when he saw the likeness to his father.

"Is your face very bad?" said Sam quietly.

The other turned away in silence.

"I'll tie it up for you, if you like," said Sam.

"It don't want no tying up."

He turned his face to the wall, and remained obstinately silent. They perceived that nothing more was to be got from him, and departed. But, turning at the door, they still saw him crouched in the corner like a wild beast, wiping his bruised face every now and then with Sam's handkerchief, apparently thinking of nothing, hoping for nothing. Such a pitiful sight—such an example of one who was gone beyond feeling hope, or sorrow, or aught else, save physical pain, that the Doctor's gorge rose, and he said, stamping on the gravel,—

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"A man, who says that that is not the saddest, saddest sight he ever saw, is a disgrace to the mother that bore him. To see a young fellow like that with such a *physique*—and God only knows what undeveloped qualities in him—only ripe for the gallows at five-and-twenty, is enough to make the angels weep. He knows no evil but physical pain, and that he considers but a temporary one. He knows no good save, perhaps, to be faithful to his confederates. He has been brought up from his cradle to look on every man as his enemy. He never knew what it was to love a human being in his life. Why, what does such a man regard this world as? As the antechamber of hell, if he ever heard of such a place. I want to know what either of us three would have been if we had had his training. I want to know that now. We might have been as much worse than he is as a wolf is worse than an evil-tempered dog."

A beautiful colley came up to the Doctor and fawned on him, looking into his face with her deep, expressive, hazel eyes.

"We must do something for that fellow, Sam. If it's only for his name's sake," said the Doctor.

* * * * *

That poor boy, sitting crouched there in the corner, with a broken jaw, and just so much of human feeling as one may suppose a polecat to have, caught in a gin, is that same baby that we saw Ellen Lee nursing on the doorstep in the rain, when our poor Mary came upon her on one wild night in Exeter.

Base-born, workhouse-bred! Tossed from workhouse to prison, from prison to hulk—every man's hand against him—an Arab of society. As hopeless a case, my lord judge, as you ever had to deal with; and yet I think, my lord, that your big heart grows a little pitiful, when you see that handsome face before you, blank and careless, and you try, fruitlessly, to raise some blush of shame, or even anger in it, by your eloquence.

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Gone beyond that, my lord. Your thunderbolts fall harmless here, and the man you say is lost, and naturally. Yet, give that same man room to breathe and act; keep temptation from him, and let his good qualities, should he have any, have fair play, and, even yet, he may convert you to the belief that hardened criminals may be reformed, to the extent of one in a dozen; beyond that no reasonable man will go.

Let us see the end of this man. For now the end of my tale draws near, and I must begin gathering up the threads of the story, to tie them in a knot, and release my readers from duty. Here is all I can gather about him,—

Sam and the Doctor moved heaven, earth, and the Colonial Secretary, to get his sentence commuted, and with success. So when his companions were led out to execution, he was held back; reserved for penal servitude for life.

He proved himself quiet and docile; so much so that when our greatest, boldest explorer was starting for his last hopeless journey to the interior, this man was selected as one of the twelve convicts who were to accompany him. What follows is an extract which I have been favoured with from his private journal. You will not find it in the published history of the expedition;—

“Date—lat.—long.—Morning. It is getting hopeless now, and to-morrow I turn. Sand, and nothing but sand. The salsolaceous plants, so long the only vegetation we have seen, are gone; and the little sienite peak, the last symptom of a water-bearing country, has disappeared behind us. The sandhills still roll away towards the setting sun, but get less and less elevated. The wild fowl are still holding their mysterious flight to the north-west, but I have not wings to follow them. Oh, my God! if I only knew what those silly birds know. It is hopeless to go on, and, I begin to fear, hopeless to go back. Will it never rain again?

“Afternoon,—My servant Hawker, one of the convicts

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assigned to me by Government, died to-day at noon. I had got fond of this man, as the most patient and the bravest, where all have been so patient and so brave. He was a very silent and reserved man, and had never complained, so that I was deeply shocked, on his sending for me at dinner-time, to find that he was dying.

“He asked me not to deceive him, but to tell him if there was any truth in what the gaol-chaplain had said, about there being another life after death. I told him earnestly that I knew it as surely as I knew that the earth was under my feet; and went on comforting him as one comforts a dying man. But he never spoke again; and we buried him in the hot sand at sundown. The first wind will obliterate the little mound we raised over him, and none will ever cross this hideous desert again. So that he will have as quiet a grave as he could wish.

“Eleven o'clock at night.—God be praised. Heavy clouds and thunder to the north.—”

So this poor workhouse-bred lad lies out among the sands of the middle desert.

Chapter XVII

Across the Snow

HAWKER the elder, as I said, casting one glance at the body of his son, whom he knew not, and another at Captain Desborough, who was just rising from the ground after his fall, set spurs to his noble chestnut horse, and pushing through the contracted barriers of slate which closed up the southern end of the amphitheatre where they had been surprised, made for the broader and rapidly rising valley which stretched beyond.

He soon reached the rocky gate, where the vast ridge of limestone alternating with the schist, and running north and south in high serrated ridges, was cut through by a

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deep fissure, formed by the never idle waters of a little creek, that in the course of ages had mined away the softer portions of the rock, and made a practicable pass towards the mountains.

He picked his way with difficulty through the tumbled boulders that lay in the chasm ; and then there was a cool brisk wind on his forehead, and a glare in his eyes. The chill breath of the west wind from the mountain—the glare of the snow that filled up the upper end of the valley, rising in level ridges towards the sky-line.

He had been this path before ; and if he had gone it a hundred times again, he would only have cursed it for a rough desperate road, the only hope of a desperate man. Not for him to notice the thousand lessons that the Lord had spread before him in the wilderness ! not for him to notice how the vegetation changed when the limestone was passed, and the white quartz reefs began to seam the slaty sides of the valley like rivers of silver ! Not for him to see how, as he went up and on, the hardy *Dicksonia* still nestled in stunted tufts among the more sheltered side gullies, long after her tenderer sister, the queenly *Alsophylla* * had been left behind. He only knew that he was a hunted wild beast, and that his lair was beyond the snow.

The creek flashed pleasantly among the broken slate, full and turbid under the mid-day sun. After midnight, when its fountains are sealed again by the frosty breath of night, that creek would be reduced to a trickling rill. His horse's feet brushed through the delicate *asplenium*, the Venus'-hair of Australia ; the *sarsaparilla* still hung in scant purple tufts on the golden wattle, and the scarlet *correa* lurked among the broken quartz.

Upwards and onwards. In front, endless cycles ago, a lava stream from some crater we know not of, had burst over the slate, with fearful clang and fierce explosion, forming a broad roadway of broken basalt up to a plateau twelve hundred feet or more above us, and not so steep

* The two species of fern-tree.

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but that a horse might be led up it. Let us go up with him, not cursing heaven and earth, as he did, but noticing how, as we ascend, the scarlet wreaths of the *Kennedia* and the crimson *Grevillea* give place to the golden *Grevillea* and the red *Epacris*; then comes the white *Epacris*, and then the grass trees, getting smaller and scantier as we go, till the little blue *Gentian*, blossoming boldly among the slippery crags, tells us that we have nearly reached the limits of vegetation.

He turned when he reached this spot, and looked around him. To the west a broad rolling down of snow, rising gradually; to the east, a noble prospect of forest and plain, hill and gully, with old Snowy winding on in broad bright curves to the sea. He looked over all the beauty and undeveloped wealth of Gipp's Land, which shall yet, please God, in fulness of time, be one of the brightest jewels in the King of England's crown, but with eyes that saw not. He turned towards the snow, and mounting his horse, which he had led up the cliff, held steadily westward.

His plans were well laid. Across the mountain, north of Lake Omeo, not far from the mighty cleft in which the infant Murray spends his youth, were two huts, erected years before by some settler, and abandoned. They had been used by a gang of bushrangers, who had been attacked by the police, and dispersed. Nevertheless, they had been since inhabited by the men we know of, who landed in the boat from Van Diemen's Land, in consequence of Hawker himself having found a pass through the ranges, open for nine months in the year. So that, when the police were searching Gipp's Land for these men, they, with the exception of two or three, were snugly ensconced on the other water-shed, waiting till the storm should blow over. In these huts Hawker intended to lie by for a short time, living on such provisions as were left, until he could make his way northward on the outskirts of the settlements, and escape.

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There was no pursuit, he thought : how could there be ? Who knew of this route but himself and his mates ? hardly likely any of them would betray him. No creature was moving in the valley he had just ascended, but the sun was beginning to slope towards the west, and he must onwards.

Onwards, across the slippery snow. At first a few tree-stems, blighted and withered, were visible right and left, proving that at some time during their existence, these bald downs had either a less elevation or a warmer climate than now. Then these even disappeared, and all around was one white blinding glare. To the right, the snow-fields rolled up into the shapeless lofty mass called Mount Tambo, behind which the hill they now call Kosciusko,*—as some say, the highest ground in the country,—began to take a crimson tint from the declining sun. Far to the south, black and gaunt among the whitened hills, towered the rounded hump of Buffaloe, while the peaks of Buller and Aberdeen showed like dim blue clouds on the furthest horizon.

Snow, and nothing but snow. Sometimes plunging shoulder deep into some treacherous hollow, sometimes guiding the tired horse across the surface frozen over unknown depths. He had been drinking hard for some days, and, now the excitement of action had gone off, was fearfully nervous. The snow-glint had dazzled his head, too, and he began to see strange shapes forming themselves in

* Mr. Macarthur, companion of Count Strzelecki, seems to believe that Kosciusko is actually the highest point. But I believe Mr. Selwyn is of opinion that there is a peak ("down" would be a more correct word) higher yet. Mount Kosciusko is between 7,000 and 8,000 feet above the sea, from which it is visible. It is hard to believe, however, that this is the highest point in the Australian Alps. The nautical charts lay down here, "snowy mountains, visible twenty-five leagues at sea." And considering that they are at least fifteen leagues inland, I cannot help thinking, either that Kosciusko is not the highest point, or that its height is underrated.

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the shade of each hollow, and start at each stumble of his horse.

A swift-flying shadow upon the snow, and a rush of wings overhead. An eagle. The lordly scavenger is following him, impatient for him to drop and become a prey. Soar up, old bird, and bide thy time ; on yonder precipice thou shalt have good chance of a meal.

Twilight, and then night, and yet the snow but half past. There is a rock in a hollow, where grow a few scanty tufts of grass which the poor horse may eat. Here he will camp, fireless, foodless, and walk up and down the livelong night, for sleep might be death. Though he is not in thoroughly Alpine regions, yet still, at this time of the year, the snow is deep and the frost is keen. It were as well to keep awake.

As he paced up and down beneath the sheltering rock, when night had closed in, and the frosty stars were twinkling in the cold blue firmament, strange ghosts and fancies came crowding on him thick and fast. Down the long vista of a misspent, ruined life, he saw people long since forgotten trooping up towards him. His father tottered sternly on, as with a fixed purpose before him ; his gipsy-mother, Madge, strode forward pitiless ; and poor ruined Ellen, holding her child to her heart, joined the others and held up her withered hand as if in mockery. But then there came a face between him and all the other figures which his distempered brain had summoned, and blotted them out ; the face of a young man, bearing a strange likeness to himself ; the face of the last human creature he had seen ; the face of the boy that he had shot down among the fern.

Why should this face grow before him wherever he turned, so that he could not look on rock or sky without seeing it ? Why should it glare at him through a blood-red haze when he shut his eyes to keep it out, not in sorrow, not in anger, but even as he had seen it last, expressing only terror and pain, as the lad rolled off his

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horse, and lay a black heap among the flowers? Up and away! anything is better than this. Let us stumble away across the snow, through the mirk night once more, rather than be driven mad by this pale boy's face.

Morning, and the pale ghosts have departed. Long shadows of horse and man are thrown before him now, as the slope dips away to the westward, and he knows that his journey is well-nigh over.

It was late in the afternoon before, having left the snow some hours, he began to lead his horse down a wooded precipice, through vegetation which grew more luxuriant every yard he descended. The glen, whose bottom he was trying to reach, was a black profound gulf, with perpendicular, or rather, over-hanging walls, on every side, save where he was scrambling down. Here indeed it was possible for a horse to keep his footing among the belts of trees, that, alternating with precipitous granite cliff, formed the upper end of one of the most tremendous glens in the world—the Gates of the Murray.

He was barely one-third of the way down this mountain wall, when the poor tired horse lost his footing and fell over the edge, touching neither tree nor stone for five hundred feet, while George Hawker was left terrified, hardly daring to peer into the dim abyss, where the poor beast was gone.

But it was little matter. The hut he was making for was barely four miles off now, and there was meat, drink, and safety. Perhaps there might be company, he hoped there might,—some of the gang might have escaped. A dog would be some sort of friend. Anything sooner than such another night as last night.

His pistols were gone with the saddle, and he was unarmed. He reached the base of the cliff in safety, and forced his way through the tangled scrub that fringed the infant river, towards the lower end of the pass. Here the granite walls, overhanging, bend forward above to meet one another, almost forming an arch, the height of which,

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from the river-bed, is computed to be nearly, if not quite, three thousand feet. Through this awful gate he forced his way, overawed and utterly dispirited, and reached the gully where his refuge lay, just as the sun was setting.

There was a slight track, partly formed by stray cattle, which led up it; and casting his eyes upon this, he saw the marks of a horse's feet. "Some one of the gang got home before me," he said. "I'm right glad of that, anything better than such another night."

He turned a sharp angle in the path, just where it ran round an abrupt cliff. He saw a horseman within ten yards of him with his face towards him. Captain Desborough, holding a pistol at his head.

"Surrender, George Hawker!" said Desborough. "Or, by the living Lord! you are a dead man."

Hungry, cold, desperate, unarmed; he saw that he was undone, and that hope was dead. The Captain had an easier prey than he had anticipated. Hawker threw up his arms, and ere he could fully appreciate his situation, he was chained fast to Desborough's saddle, only to be loosed, he knew, by the gallows.

Without a word on either side they began their terrible journey. Desborough riding, and Hawker manacled by his right wrist to the saddle. Fully a mile was passed before the latter asked sullenly,—

"Where are you going to take me to-night?"

"To Dickenson's," replied Desborough. "You must step out, you know. It will be for your own good, for I must get there to-night."

Two or three miles further were got over, when Hawker said abruptly,—

"Look here, Captain, I want to talk to you."

"You had better not," said Desborough. "I don't want to have any communication with you, and every word you say will go against you."

"Bah!" said Hawker. "I must swing. I know that. I shan't make any defence. Why, the devils out of hell

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would come into court against me if I did. But I want to ask you a question or two. You haven't got the character of being a brutal fellow, like O——. It can't hurt you to answer me one or two things, and ease my mind a bit."

"God help you, unhappy man;" said Desborough. "I will answer any questions you ask."

"Well, then, see here," said Hawker, hesitating. "I want to know—I want to know first, how you got round before me?"

"Is that all?" said Desborough. "Well, I came round over Broadsaddle, and got a fresh horse at the Parson's."

"Ah!" said Hawker. "That young fellow I shot down when you were after me, is he dead?"

"By this time," said Desborough. "He was just dying when I came away."

"Would you mind stopping for a moment, Captain? Now tell me, who was he?"

"Mr. Charles Hawker, son of Mrs. Hawker, of Toonarbin."

He gave such a yell that Desborough shrunk from him appalled,—a cry as of a wounded tiger, and struggled so wildly with his handcuff that the blood poured from his wrist. Let us close this scene. Desborough told me afterwards, that that wild, fierce, despairing cry, rang in his ears for many years afterwards, and would never be forgotten till those ears were closed with the dust of the grave.

Chapter XVIII

How Mary Hawker heard the News

TROUBRIDGE'S STATION, Toonarbin, lay so far back from the river, and so entirely on the road to nowhere, that Tom used to remark, that he would back it for being the worst station for news in the country. So it happened

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while these terrible scenes were enacting within ten miles of them, down, in fact, to about one o'clock in the day when the bushrangers were overtaken and punished, Mary and her cousin sat totally unconscious of what was going on.

But about eleven o'clock that day, Burnside, the cattle-dealer, mentioned once before in these pages, arrived at Major Buckley's, from somewhere up country, and found the house apparently deserted.

But having co'eed for some time, a door opened in one of the huts, and a sleepy groom came forth, yawning.

"Where are they all?" asked Burnside.

"Mrs. Buckley and the women were down at Mrs. Mayford's, streaking the bodies out," he believed. "The rest were gone away after the gang."

This was the first that Burnside had heard about the matter. And now, bit by bit, he extracted everything from the sleepy groom.

I got him afterwards to confess to me, that when he heard of this terrible affair, his natural feeling of horror was considerably alloyed with pleasure. He saw here at one glance a fund of small talk for six months. He saw himself a welcome visitor at every station, even up to furthest lonely Condamine, retailing the news of these occurrences with all the authenticity of an eye-witness, improving his narrative by each repetition. Here was the basis of a new tale, Ode, Epic, Saga, or what you may please to call it, which he Burnside, the bard, should sing at each fireside throughout the land.

"And how are Mrs. and Miss Mayford, poor souls?" he asked.

"They're as well," answered the groom, "as you'd expect folks to be after such a mishap. They ran out at the back way and down the garden towards the river before the chaps could burst the door down. I am sorry for that little chap Cecil; I am, by Jove! A straightforward, manly little chap as ever crossed a horse. Last week he

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says to me, says he, 'Benjy, my boy,' says he, 'come and be groom to me. I'll give you thirty pound a-year.' And I says, 'If Mr. Sam—' Hallo, there they are at it, hammer and tongs ! Sharp work, that !"

They both listened intensely. They could hear, borne on the west wind, a distant dropping fire and a shouting. The groom's eye began to kindle a bit, but Burnside, sitting yet upon his horse, grasped the lad's shoulder and cried, "God save us, suppose our men should be beaten !"

"Suppose," said the groom, contemptuously shaking him off ; "why then you and I should get our throats cut."

At this moment the noise of the distant fight breezed up louder than ever.

"They're beat back," said Burnside. "I shall be off to Toonarbin, and give them warning. I advise you to save yourself."

"I was set to mind these here things," said Benjy, "and I'm a-going to mind 'em. And they as meddles with 'em had better look out."

Burnside started off for Toonarbin, and when half-way there he paused and listened. The firing had ceased. When he came to reflect, now that his panic was over, he had very little doubt that Desborough's party had gained the day. It was impossible, he thought, that it could be otherwise.

Nevertheless, being half-way to Toonarbin, he determined to ride on, and, having called in a moment, to follow a road which took a way past Lee's old hut towards the scene of action. He very soon pulled up at the door, and Tom Troubridge came slowly out to meet him.

"Hallo, Burnside !" said Tom. "Get off, and come in."

"Not I, indeed. I am going off to see the fight."

"What fight ?" said Mary Hawker, looking over Tom's shoulder.

"Do you mean to say you have not heard the news ?"

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“Not a word of any news for a fortnight.”

For once in his life, Burnside was laconic, and told them all that had happened. Tom spoke not a word, but ran up to the stable and had a horse out, saddled in a minute, he was dashing into the house again for his hat and pistols when he came against Mary in the passage, leaning against the wall.

“Tom,” she whispered hoarsely. “Bring that boy back to me safe, or never look me in the face again!”

He never answered her, he was thinking of some one beside the boy. He pushed past her, and the next moment she saw him gallop away with Burnside, followed by two men, and now she was left alone indeed, and helpless.

There was not a soul about the place but herself; not a soul within ten miles. She stood looking out of the door fixedly, at nothing, for a time; but then, as hour by hour went on, and the afternoon stillness fell upon the forest, and the shadows began to slant, a terror began to grow upon her which at length became unbearable, and well-nigh drove her mad.

At the first she understood that all these years of anxiety had come to a point at last, and a strange feeling of excitement, almost joy, came over her. She was one of those impetuous characters who stand suspense worse than anything, and now, although terror was in her, she felt as though relief was nigh. Then she began to think again of her son, but only for an instant. He was under Major Buckley's care, and must be safe; so that she dismissed that fear from her mind for a time, but only for a time. It came back to her again. Why did he not come to her? Why had not the Major sent him off to her at once? Could the Major have been killed? even if so, there was Dr. Mulhaus. Her terrors were absurd.

But not the less terrors, that grew in strength hour by hour, as she waited there, looking at the pleasant spring forest, and no one came. Terrors that grew at last so

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strong, that they took the place of certainties. Some hitch must have taken place, and her boy must be gone out with the rest.

Having got as far as this, to go further was no difficulty. He was killed, she felt sure of it, and none had courage to come and tell her of it. She suddenly determined to verify her thoughts at once, and went in doors to get her hat.

She had fully made up her mind that he must be killed at this time. The hope of his having escaped was gone. We, who know the real state of the case, should tremble for her reason, when she finds her fears so terribly true. We shall see.

She determined to start away to the Brentwoods', and end her present state of terror one way or another. Tom had taken the only horse in the stable, but her own brown pony was running in the paddock with some others; and she sallied forth, worn out, feverish, half-mad, to try to catch him.

The obstinate brute would not be caught. Then she spent a weary hour trying to drive them all into the stock-yard, but in vain. Three times, she, with infinite labour, drove them up to the slip-rail, and each time the same mare and foal broke away, leading off the others. The third time, when she saw them all run whinnying down to the further end of the paddock, after half an hour or so of weary work driving them up, when she had run herself off her poor tottering legs, and saw that all her toil was in vain, then she sank down on the cold hard gravel in the yard, with her long black hair streaming loose along the ground, and prayed that she might die. Down at full length, in front of her own door, like a dead woman, moaning and crying, from time to time, "Oh, my boy, my boy."

How long she lay there she knew not. She heard a horse's feet, but only stopped her ears from the news she thought was coming. Then she heard a steady heavy

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footstep close to her, and some one touched her, and tried to raise her.

She sat up, shook the hair from her eyes, and looked at the man who stood beside her. At first she thought it was a phantom of her own brain, but then looking wildly at the calm, solemn features, and the kindly grey eyes which were gazing at her so inquiringly, she pronounced his name—"Frank Maberly."

"God save you, madam," he said. "What is the matter?"

"Misery, wrath, madness, despair!" she cried wildly, raising her hand. "The retribution of a lifetime fallen on my luckless head in one unhappy moment."

Frank Maberly looked at her in real pity, but a thought went through his head. "What a magnificent actress this woman would make." It merely passed through his brain and was gone, and then he felt ashamed of himself for entertaining it a moment; and yet it was not altogether an unnatural one for him who knew her character so well. She was lying on the ground in an attitude which would have driven Siddons to despair; one white arm, down which her sleeve had fallen, pressed against her forehead, while the other clutched the ground; and her splendid black hair fallen down across her shoulders. Yet how could he say how much of all this wild despair was real, and how much hysterical?"

"But what is the matter, Mary Hawker?" he asked. "Tell me, or how can I help you?"

"Matter?" she said. "Listen. The bushrangers are come down from the mountains, spreading ruin, murder, and destruction far and wide. My husband is captain of the gang: and my son, my only son, whom I have loved better than my God, is gone with the rest to hunt them down—to seek, unknowing, his own father's life. There is mischief beyond your mending, priest!"

Beyond his mending, indeed. He saw it. "Rise up," he said, "and act. Tell me all the circumstances. Is it too late?"

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She told him how it had come to pass, and then he showed her that all her terrors were but anticipations, and might be false. He got her pony for her, and, as night was falling, rode away with her along the mountain road that led to Captain Brentwood's.

The sun was down, and ere they had gone far, the moon was bright overhead. Frank, having fully persuaded himself that all her terrors were the effect of an overwrought imagination, grew cheerful, and tried to laugh her out of them. She, too, with the exercise of riding through the night-air, and the company of a handsome, agreeable, well-bred man, began to have a lurking idea that she had been making a fool of herself; when they came suddenly on a hut, dark, cheerless, deserted, standing above a black, stagnant, reed-grown waterhole.

The hut where Frank had gone to preach to the stockmen. The hut where Lee had been murdered—an ill-omened place; and as they came opposite to it, they saw two others approaching them in the moonlight—Major Buckley and Alice Brentwood.

Then Alice, pushing forward, bravely met her, and told her all—all, from beginning to end; and when she had finished, having borne up nobly, fell to weeping as though her heart would break. But Mary did not weep, or cry, or fall down. She only said, "Let me see him," and went on with them, silent and steady.

They got to Garoopna late at night, none having spoken all the way. Then they showed her into the room where poor Charles lay, cold and stiff, and there she stayed hour after hour through the weary night. Alice looked in once or twice, and saw her sitting on the bed which bore the corpse of her son, with her face buried in her hands; and at last, summoning courage, took her by the arm and led her gently to bed.

Then she went into the drawing-room, where, besides her father, were Major Buckley, Dr. Mulhaus, Frank Maberly, and the drunken doctor before spoken of, who

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had had the sublime pleasure of cutting a bullet from his old adversary's arm, and was now in a fair way to justify the *sobriquet* I have so often applied to him. I myself also was sitting next the fire, alongside of Frank Maberly.

"My brave girl," said the Major, "how is she?"

"I hardly can tell you, sir," said Alice: "she is so very quiet. If she would cry now, I should be very glad. It would not frighten me so much as seeing her like that. I fear she will die!"

"If her reason holds," said the Doctor, "she will get over it. She had, from all accounts, gone through every phase of passion down to utter despair, before she knew the blow had fallen. Poor Mary!"

* * * * *

There, we have done. All this misery has come on her from one act of folly and selfishness years ago. How many lives are ruined, how many families broken up, by one false step! If ever a poor soul has expiated her own offence, she has. Let us hope that brighter times are in store for her. Let us have done with moral reflections; I am no hand at that work. One more dark scene, reader, and then.—

* * * * *

It was one wild dreary day in the spring; a day of furious wind and cutting rain; a day when few passengers were abroad, and when the boatmen were gathered in knots among the sheltered spots upon the quays, waiting to hear of disasters at sea; when the ships creaked and groaned at the wharfs, and the harbour was a sheet of wind-driven foam, and the domain was strewn with broken boughs. On such a day as this, Major Buckley and myself, after a sharp walk, found ourselves in front of the principal gaol in Sydney.

We were admitted, for we had orders; and a small, wiry, clever-looking man, about fifty, bowed to us as we entered the whitewashed corridor, which led from the en-

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trance hall. We had a few words with him, and then followed him.

To the darkest passage in the darkest end of that dreary place ; to the condemned cells. And my heart sunk as the heavy bolt shot back, and we went into the first one on the right.

Before us was a kind of bed-place. And on that bed-place lay the figure of a man. Though it is twenty years ago since I saw it, I can remember that scene as though it were yesterday.

He lay upon a heap of tumbled blankets, with his face buried in a pillow. One leg touched the ground, and round it was a ring, connecting the limb to a long iron bar, which ran along beneath the bed. One arm also hung listlessly on the cold stone floor, and the other was thrown around his head. A head covered with short black curls, worthy of an Antinous, above a bare muscular neck, worthy of a Farnese Hercules. I advanced towards him.

The governor held me back. "My God, sir," he said, "take care. Don't, as you value your life, go within length of his chain." But at that moment the handsome head was raised from the pillow, and my eyes met George Hawker's. Oh, Lord ! such a piteous wild look. I could not see the fierce desperate villain who had kept our country-side in terror so long. No, thank God, I could only see the handsome curly-headed boy who used to play with James Stockbridge and myself among the grave-stones in Drumston church-yard. I saw again the merry lad who used to bathe with us in Hatherleigh water, and whom, with all his faults, I had once loved well. And seeing him, and him only, before me, in spite of a terrified gesture from the governor, I walked up to the bed, and, sitting down beside him, put my arm round his neck.

"George ! George ! Dear old friend !" I said. "O, George, my boy, has it come to this ?"

I don't want to be instructed in my duty. I know what

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my duty was on that occasion as well as any man. My duty as a citizen and a magistrate was to stand at the further end of the cell, and give this hardened criminal a moral lecture, showing how honesty and virtue, as in my case, had led to wealth and honour, and how yielding to one's passions had led to disgrace and infamy, as in his. That was my duty, I allow. But then, you see, I didn't do my duty. I had a certain tender feeling about my stomach which prevented me from doing it. So I only hung there, with my arm round his neck, and said, from time to time, "O George, George!" like a fool.

He put his two hands upon my shoulders, so that his fetters hung across my breast, and he looked me in the face. Then he said, after a time, "What! Hamlyn? Old Jeff Hamlyn! The only man I ever knew that I didn't quarrel with! Come to see me now, eh? Jeff, old boy, I'm to be hung to-morrow."

"I know it," I said. "And I came to ask you if I could do anything for you. For the sake of dear old Devon, George."

"Anything you like, old Jeff," he said, with a laugh, "so long as you don't get me reprieved. If I get loose again, lad, I'd do worse than I ever did yet, believe me. I've piled up a tolerable heap of wickedness as it is, though. I've murdered my own son, Jeff. Do you know that?"

I answered—"Yes; I know that, George; but that was an accident. You did not know who he was."

"He came at me to take my life," said Hawker. "And I tell you, as a man who goes out to be hung to-morrow, that, if I had guessed who he was, I'd have blown my own brains out to save him from the crime of killing me. Who is that man?"

"Don't you remember him?" I said. "Major Buckley."

The Major came forward, and held out his hand to George Hawker. "You are now," he said, "like a dead

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man to me. You die to-morrow ; and you know it ; and face it like a man. I come to ask you to forgive me anything you may have to forgive. I have been your enemy since I first saw you : but I have been an honest and open enemy ; and now I am your enemy no longer. I ask you to shake hands with me. I have been warned not to come within arm's length of you, chained as you are. But I am not afraid of you."

The Major came and sat on the bed-place beside him.

"As for that little animal," said George Hawker, pointing to the governor, as he stood at the further end of the cell, "if he comes within reach of me, I'll beat his useless little brains out against the wall, and he knows it. He was right to caution you not to come too near me. I nearly killed a man yesterday ; and to-morrow, when they come to lead me out—— But, with regard to you, Major Buckley, the case is different. Do you know I should be rather sorry to tackle you ; I'm afraid you would be too heavy for me. As to my having anything to forgive, Major, I don't know that there is anything. If there is, let me tell you that I feel more kind and hearty towards you and Hamlyn for coming to me like this to-day, than I've felt toward any man this twenty year. By-the-bye ; let no man go to the gallows without clearing himself as far as he may. Do you know that I set on that red-haired villain, Moody, to throttle Bill Lee, because I hadn't pluck to do it myself."

"Poor Lee," said the Major.

"Poor devil," said Hawker. "Why that man had gone through every sort of villany, from " (so and so up to so and so, he said ; I shall not particularise) "before my beard was grown. Why that man laid such plots and snares for me when I was a lad, that a bishop could not have escaped. He egged me on to forge my own father's name. He drove me on to ruin. And now, because it suited his purpose to turn honest, and act faithful domes-

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tic to my wife for twenty years, he is mourned for as an exemplary character, and I go to the gallows. He was a meaner villain than ever I was."

"George," I asked, "have you any message for your wife?"

"Only this," he said; "tell her I always liked her pretty face, and I'm sorry I brought disgrace upon her. Through all my rascalities, old Jeff, I swear to you that I respected and liked her to the last. I tried to see her last year, only to tell her that she needn't be afraid of me, and should treat me as a dead man; but she and her blessed pig-headed lover, Tom Troubridge, made such knife and pistol work of it, that I never got the chance of saying the word I wanted. She'd have saved herself much trouble if she hadn't acted so much like a frightened fool. I never meant her any harm. You may tell her all this if you judge right, but I leave it to you. Time's up, I see. I ain't so much of a coward, am I, Jeff? Good-bye, old lad, good-bye."

That was the last we saw of him; the next morning he was executed with four of his comrades. But now the Major and I, leaving him, went off again into the street, into the rain and the furious wind, to beat up against it for our hotel. Neither spoke a word till we came to a corner in George Street, nearest the wharf: and then the Major turned back upon me suddenly, and I thought he had been unable to face the terrible gust which came sweeping up from the harbour: but it was not so. He had turned on purpose, and putting his hands upon my shoulders, he said,—

"Hamlyn, Hamlyn, you have taught me a lesson."

"I suppose so," I said. "I have shown you what a fool a tender-hearted soft-headed fellow may make of himself by yielding to his impulses. But I have a defence to offer, my dear sir, the best of excuses, the only real excuse existing in this world. I couldn't help it."

"I don't mean that, Hamlyn," he answered. "The

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lesson you have taught me is a very different one. You have taught me that there are bright points in the worst man's character, a train of good feeling which no tact can bring out, but yet which some human spark of feeling may light. Here is this man Hawker, of whom we heard that he was dangerous to approach, and whom the good Chaplain was forced to pray for and exhort from a safe distance. The man for whose death, till ten minutes ago, I was rejoicing. The man I thought lost, and beyond hope. Yet you, by one burst of unpremeditated folly, by one piece of silly sentimentality, by ignoring the man's later life, and carrying him back in imagination to his old schoolboy days, have done more than our good old friend the Chaplain could have done without your assistance. There is a spark of the Divine in the worst of men, if you can only find it."

In spite of the Major's parliamentary and didactic way of speaking, I saw there was truth at the bottom of what he said, and that he meant kindly to me, and to the poor fellow who was even now among the dead; so instead of arguing with him, I took his arm, and we fought homewards together through the driving rain.

Imagine three months to have passed. That stormy spring had changed into a placid, burning summer. 'The busy shearing-time was past; the noisy shearers were dispersed, heaven knows where (most of them probably suffering from a shortness of cash, complicated with delirium tremens). The grass in the plains had changed from green to dull grey; the river had changed his hoarse roar for a sleepy murmur, as though too lazy to quarrel with his boulders in such weather. A hot dull haze was over forest and mountain. The snow had perspired till it showed long black streaks on the highest eminences. In short, summer had come with a vengeance; every one felt hot, idle, and thirsty, and "there was nothing doing."

Now that broad cool veranda of Captain Brentwood's, with its deep recesses of shadow, was a place not to be

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lightly spoken of. Any man once getting footing there, and leaving it, except on compulsion, would show himself of weak mind. Any man once comfortably settled there in an easy chair, who fetched anything for himself when he could get any one else to fetch it for him, would show himself, in my opinion, a man of weak mind. One thing only was wanted to make it perfect, and that was niggers. To the winds with "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and "Dred" after it, in a hot wind! What can an active-minded, self-helpful lady like Mrs. Stowe, freezing up there in Connecticut, obliged to do something to keep herself warm,—what can she, I ask, know about the requirements of a southern gentleman when the thermometer stands at 125° in the shade. Pish! Does she know the exertion required for cutting up a pipe of tobacco in the hot north wind? No! Does she know the amount of perspiration and anger superinduced by knocking the head off a bottle of Bass in January? Does she know the physical prostration which is caused by breaking up two lumps of hard white sugar in a pawnee before a thunderstorm? No, she doesn't, or she would cry out for niggers with the best of us! When the thermometer gets over 100° in the shade, all men would have slaves if they were allowed. An Anglo-Saxon conscience will not, save in rare instances, bear a higher average heat than 95°.

But about this veranda. It was the model and type of all verandas. It was made originally by the Irish family, the Donovans, before spoken of; and, like all Irish-made things, was nobly conceived, beautifully carried out, and then left to take care of itself, so that when Alice came into possession, she found it a neglected mine of rare creepers run wild. Here, for the first time, I saw the exquisite crimson passion-flower,* then a great rarity. Here, too, the native passion-flower, scarlet and orange, was tangled up with the common purple sarsaparilla and the English honeysuckle and jessamine.

* *Passiflora Loudonia*, I believe.

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In this veranda, one blazing morning, sat Mrs. Buckley and Alice making believe to work. Mrs. Buckley really was doing something. Alice sat with her hands fallen on her lap, so still and so beautiful, that she might then and there have been photographed off by some enterprising artist, and exhibited in the print shops as "Argia, Goddess of Laziness."

They were not alone, however. Across the very coolest, darkest corner was swung a hammock, looking at which you might perceive two hands elevating a green paper-covered pamphlet, as though the owner were reading—the aforesaid owner, however, being entirely invisible, only proving his existence by certain bulges and angles in the canvas of the hammock.

Now having made a nice little mystery as to who it was lying there, I will proceed to solve it. A burst of laughter came from the hidden man, so uproarious and violent, that the hammock-strings strained and shook, and the magpie, waking up from a sound sleep, cursed and swore in a manner fearful to hear.

"My dearest Jim!" said Alice, rousing herself, "what is the matter with you?"

Jim read aloud the immortal battle of the two editors, with the carpet bag and the fire shovel, in "Pickwick," and, ere he had half done, Alice and Mrs. Buckley had mingled their laughter with his, quite as heartily, if not so loudly.

"Hallo!" said Jim; "here's a nuisance! There's no more of it. Alice, have you got any more?"

"That is all, Jim. The other numbers will come by the next mail."

"How tiresome! I suppose the governor is pretty sure to be home to-night. He can't be away much longer."

"Don't be impatient, my dear," said Alice. "How is your leg?"

Please remember that Jim's leg was broken in the late wars, and, as yet, hardly well.

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"Oh, it's a good deal better. Heigho! This is very dull."

"Thank you, James!" said Mrs. Buckley. "Dear me! the heat gets greater every day. If they are on the road, I hope they won't hurry themselves."

Our old friends were just now disposed in the following manner:—

The Major was at home. Mary Hawker was staying with him. Dr. Mulhaus and Halbert staying at Major Buckley's, while Captain Brentwood was away with Sam and Tom Troubridge to Sydney; and, having been absent some weeks, had been expected home now for a day or two. This was the day they came home, riding slowly up to the porch about five o'clock.

When all greetings were done, and they were sat down beside the others, Jim opened the ball by asking, "What news, father?"

"What a particularly foolish question!" said the Captain. "Why, you'll get it all in time—none the quicker for being impatient. May be, also, when you hear some of the news, you won't like it!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Jim.

"I have a letter for you here, from the Commander-in-Chief. You are appointed to the 3—th Regiment, at present quartered in India."

Alice looked at him quickly as she heard this, and, as a natural consequence, Sam looked too. They had expected that he would have hurra'd aloud, or thrown up his hat, or danced about when he heard of it. But no; he only sat bolt upright in his hammock, though his face flushed scarlet, and his eyes glistened strangely.

His father looked at him an instant, and then continued,—

"Six months' leave of absence procured at the same time, which will give you about three months more at home. So you see you now possess the inestimable privilege of wearing a red coat; and what is still better, of

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getting a hole made in it; for there is great trouble threatening with the Affghans and Beloochs, and the chances are that you will smell powder before you are up in your regimental duties. Under which circumstances I shall take the liberty of requesting that you inform yourself on these points under my direction, for I don't want you to join your regiment in the position of any other booby. Have the goodness to lie down again and not excite yourself. You have anticipated this some time. Surely it is not necessary for you to cry about it like a great girl."

But that night, after dark, when Sam and Alice were taking one of those agreeable nocturnal walks, which all young lovers are prone to, they came smoothly gliding over the lawn close up to the house, and then, unseen and unheard, they saw Captain Brentwood with his arm round Jim's neck, and heard him say,—

"O James! James! why did you want to leave me?"

And Jim answered, "Father, I didn't know. I didn't know my own mind. But I can't call back now."

Sam and Alice slipt back again, and continued their walk. Let us hear what conversation they had been holding together before this little interruption.

"Alice, my darling, my love, you are more beautiful than ever!"

"Thanks to your absence, my dear Sam. You see how well I thrive without you."

"Then when we are——"

"Well?" said Alice. For this was eight o'clock in the evening, you know, and the moon being four days past the full, it was pitch dark. "Well?" said she.

"When we are married," said Sam, audaciously, "I suppose you will pine away to nothing."

"Good gracious me!" she answered. "Married? Why surely we are well enough as we are."

"Most excellently well, my darling," said Sam. "I wish it could last for ever."

"Oh, indeed!" said Alice, almost inaudibly though.

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"Alice, my love," said Sam, "have you thought of one thing? Have you thought that I must make a start in life for myself?"

No, she hadn't thought of that. Didn't see why Baroona wasn't good enough for him.

"My dear!" he said. "Baroona is a fine property, but it is not mine. I want money for a set purpose. For a glorious purpose, my love! I will not tell you yet, not for years perhaps, what that purpose is. But I want fifty thousand pounds of my own. And fifty thousand pounds I will have."

Good gracious! What an avaricious creature. Such a quantity of money. And so she wasn't to hear what he was going to do with it, for ever so many years. Wouldn't he tell her now? She would so like to know. Would nothing induce him?

Yes, there was something. Nay, what harm! Only an honest lover's kiss, among the ripening grapes. In the dark, you say. My dear madam, you would not have them kiss one another in broad day, with the cook watching them out of the kitchen window?

"Alice," he said, "I have had one object before me from my boyhood, and since you told me that I was to be your husband, that object has grown from a vague intention to a fixed purpose. Alice, I want to buy back the acres of my forefathers; I wish, I intend, that another Buckley shall be the master of Clere, and that you shall be his wife."

"Sam, my love!" she said, turning on him suddenly. "What a magnificent idea. Is it possible?"

"Easy," said Sam. "My father could do it, but will not. He and my mother have severed every tie with the old country, and it would be at their time of life only painful to go back to the old scenes and interests. But with me it is different. Think of you and I taking the place we are entitled to by birth and education, in the splendid society of that noble island. Don't let me hear all that balderdash about the founding of new empires.

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Empires take too long in growing for me. What honours, what society, has this little colony to give, compared to those open to a fourth-rate gentleman in England? I want to be a real Englishman, not half a one. I want to throw in my lot heart and hand with the greatest nation in the world. I don't want to be young Sam Buckley of Baroona. I want to be the Buckley of Clere. Is not that a noble ambition?"

"My whole soul goes with you, Sam," said Alice. "My whole heart and soul. Let us consult, and see how this is to be done."

"This is the way the thing stands," said Sam. "The house and park at Clere, were sold by my father for 12,000*l.* to a brewer. Since then, this brewer, a most excellent fellow by all accounts, has bought back, acre by acre, nearly half the old original property as it existed in my great grandfather's time, so that now Clere must be worth fifty thousand pounds at least. This man's children are all dead; and as far as Captain Brentwood has been able to find out for me, no one knows exactly how the property is going. The present owner is the same age as my father; and at his death, should an advantageous offer be made, there would be a good chance of getting the heirs to sell the property. We should have to pay very highly for it, but consider what a position we should buy with it. The county would receive us with open arms. That is all I know at present."

"A noble idea," said Alice, "and well considered. Now what are you going to do?"

"Have you heard tell yet," said Sam, "of the new country to the north, they call the Darling Downs?"

"I have heard of it from Burnside the cattle-dealer. He describes it as a paradise of wealth."

"He is right. When you get through the Cypress, the plains are endless. It is undoubtedly the finest piece of country found yet. Now do you know Tom Troubridge?"

"Slightly enough," said Alice, laughing.

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"Well," said Sam. "You know he went to Sydney with us, and before he had been three days there he came to me full of this Darling Down country. Quite mad about it in fact. And in the end he said: 'Sam, what money have you got?' I said that my father had promised me seven thousand pounds for a certain purpose, and that I had come to town partly to look for an investment. He said, 'Be my partner;' and I said, 'What for?' 'Darling Downs,' he said. And I said I was only too highly honoured by such a mark of confidence from such a man, and that I closed with his offer at once. To make a long matter short, he is off to the new country to take up ground under the name of Troubridge and Buckley. There!"

"But oughtn't you to have gone up with him, Sam?"

"I proposed to do so, as a matter of course," said Sam. "But what do you think he said?"

"I don't know."

"He gave me a great slap on the back," said Sam; "and, said he, 'Go home, my old lad, marry your wife, and fetch her up to keep house.' That's what he said. And now, my own love, my darling, will you tell me, am I to go up alone, and wait for you; or will you come up, and make a happy home for me in that dreary desert? Will you leave your home, and come away with me into the grey hot plains of the west?"

"I have no home in future, Sam," she said, "but where you are, and I will gladly go with you to the world's end."

And so that matter was settled.

And now Sam disclosed to her that a visitor was expected at the station in about a fortnight or three weeks; and he was no less a person than our old friend the dean, Frank Maberly. And then he went on to ask, did she think that she could manage by that time to—, eh? Such an excellent opportunity, you know; seemed almost as if his visit had been arranged; which, between you and I, it had.

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She thought it wildly possible, if there was any real necessity for it. And after this they went in; and Alice went into her bedroom.

"And what have you been doing out there with Alice all this time, eh?" asked the Captain.

"I've been asking a question, sir."

"You must have put it in a pretty long form. What sort of an answer did you get?"

"I got 'yes' for an answer, sir."

"Ah, well! Mrs. Buckley, can you lend Baroona to a new married couple for a few weeks, do you think? There is plenty of room for you here."

And then into Mrs. Buckley's astonished ear all the new plans were poured. She heard that Sam and Alice were to be married in a fortnight, and that Sam had gone into partnership with Tom Troubridge.

"Stop there," she said; "not too much at once. What becomes of Mary Hawker?"

"She is left at Toonarbin, with an overseer, for the present."

"And when," she asked, "shall you leave us, Sam?"

"Oh, in a couple of months, I suppose. I must give Tom time to get a house up before I go and join him. What a convenient thing a partner like that is, eh?"

"Oh, by-the-bye, Mrs. Buckley," said Captain Brentwood, "what do you make of this letter?"

He produced a broad thick letter, directed in a bold running hand,

"Major Buckley,

"Baroona, Combermere County,

"Gipp's Land.

"If absent, to be left with the nearest magistrate, and a receipt taken for it."

"How very strange," said Mrs. Buckley, turning it over. "Where did you get it?"

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“Sergeant Jackson asked me, as nearest magistrate, to take charge of it; and so I did. It has been forwarded by orderly from Sydney.”

“And the Governor’s private seal, too,” said Mrs. Buckley. “I don’t know when my curiosity has been so painfully excited. Put it on the chimney-piece, Sam; let us gaze on the outside, even if we are denied to see the inside. I wonder if your father will come to-night?”

“No; getting too late,” said Sam. “Evidently Halbert and the Doctor have found themselves there during their ride, and are keeping him and Mrs. Hawker company. They will all three be over to-morrow morning, depend on it.”

“What a really good fellow that Halbert is,” said Captain Brentwood. “One of the best companions I ever met. I wish his spirits would improve with his health. A sensitive fellow like him is not apt to recover from a blow like his.”

“What blow?” said Mrs. Buckley.

“Did you never hear?” said the Captain. “The girl he was going to be married to, got drowned coming out to him in the Assam.”

Chapter XIX

In which there are some astonishing Revelations with Regard to
Dr. Mulhaus and Captain Desborough

AT ten o’clock the next morning arrived the Major, the Doctor, and Halbert; and the first notice they had of it was the Doctor’s voice in the passage, evidently in a great state of excitement.

“No more the common bower-bird than you, sir; a new species. His eyes are red instead of blue, and the whole plumage is lighter. I will call it after you, my dear Major.”

“You have got to shoot him first,” said the Major.

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"I'll soon do that," said the Doctor, bursting into the room-door. "How do you do, all of you? Sam, glad to see you back again. Brentwood, you are welcome to your own house. Get me your gun—where is it?"

"In my bedroom," said the Captain.

The Doctor went off after it. He reappeared again to complain that the caps would not fit; but, being satisfied on that score, he disappeared down the garden, on murderous thoughts intent.

Sam got his father away into the veranda, and told him all his plans. I need hardly say that they met with the Major's entire approval. All his plans, I said; no, not all. Sam never hinted at the end and object of all his endeavours; he never said a word about his repurchase of Clere. The Major had no more idea that Sam had ever thought of such a thing, or had been making inquiries, than had the owner of Clere himself.

"Sam, my dear boy," said he, "I am very sorry to lose you, and we shall have but a dull time of it henceforth; but I am sure it is good for a man to go out into the world by himself" (and all that sort of thing). "When you are gone, Brentwood and I mean to live together to console one another."

"My dear, are you coming in?" said Mrs. Buckley. "Here is a letter for you, which I ought to have given you before."

The Major went in and received the mysterious epistle which the Captain had brought the night before. When he saw it he whistled.

They sat waiting to know the contents. He was provokingly long in opening it, and when he did, he said nothing, but read it over twice with a lengthening visage. Now also it became apparent that there was another letter inside, at the superscription of which the Major having looked, put it in his pocket, and turning round to the mantel-piece, with his back to the others, began drumming against the fender with his foot, musingly.

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A more aggravating course of proceeding he could not have resorted to. Here they were all dying of curiosity, and not a word did he seem inclined to answer. At last, Mrs. Buckley, not able to hold out any longer, said,—

“From the Governor, was it not, my love?”

“Yes,” he said, “from the Governor. And very important too,” and then relapsed into silence.

Matters were worse than ever. But after a few minutes he turned round to them suddenly, and said,—

“You have heard of Baron Landstein?”

“What,” said Sam, “the man that the Doctor’s always abusing so? Yes, I know all about him, of course.”

“The noble Landstein,” said Alice. “In spite of the Doctor’s abuse he is a great favourite of mine. How well he seems to have behaved at Jena with those two Landwehr regiments.”

“Landsturm, my love,” said the Major.

“Yes, Landsturm, I mean. I wonder if he is still alive, or whether he died of his wounds.”

“The Doctor,” said Sam, “always speaks of him as dead.”

“He is not only alive,” said the Major, “but he is coming here. He will be here to-day. He may come any minute.”

“What! the great Landstein?” said Sam.

“The same man,” said the Major.

“The Doctor will have a quarrel with him, father. He is always abusing him. He says he lost the battle of Jena, or something.”

“Be quiet, Sam, and don’t talk. Watch what follows.”

The Doctor was seen hurrying up the garden-walk. He put down his gun outside, and bursting open the glass door, stepped into the room, holding aloft a black bird, freshly killed, and looking around him for applause.

“There!” he said; “I told you so.”

The Major walked across the room, and put a letter in his hand, the one which was enclosed in the mysterious

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epistle before mentioned. "Baron," he said, "here is a letter for you."

The Doctor looked round as one would who had received a blow, and knew not who smote him. He took the letter, and went into the window to read it.

No one spoke a word. "This, then, my good old tutor," thought Sam, "turns out to be the great Landstein. Save us, what a piece of romance." But, though he thought this, he never said anything, and catching Alice's eye, followed it to the window. There, leaning against the glass, his face buried in his hands, and his broad back shaking with emotion, stood Dr. Mulhaus. Alas! no. Our kindly, good, hearty, learned, irritable, but dearly-beloved friend, is no more. There never was such a man in reality: but in his place stands Baron von Landstein of the Niederwald.

What the contents of the Doctor's (I must still call him so) letter, I cannot tell you. But I have seen the letter which Major Buckley received enclosing it, and I can give it you word for word. It is from the Governor himself, and runs thus:—

"MY DEAR MAJOR,

"I am informed that the famous Baron von Landstein has been living in your house for some years, under the name of Doctor Mulhaus. In fact, I believe he is a partner of yours. I therefore send the enclosed under cover to you, and when I tell you that it has been forwarded to me through the Foreign Office, and the Colonial Office, and is, in point of fact, an autograph letter from the King of P—to the Baron, I am sure that you will ensure its safe delivery.

"The Secretary is completely 'fixed' with his estimates. The salaries for the Supreme Court Office are thrown out. He must resign. Do next election send us a couple of moderates.

"Yours, &c.

G. G."

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This was the Major's letter. But the Doctor stood still there, moved more deeply than any had seen him before, while Alice and Sam looked at one another in blank astonishment.

At length he turned and spoke, but not to them, to the empty air. Spoke as one aroused from a trance. Things hard to understand, yet having some thread of sense in them too.

"So he has sent for me," he said, "when it seems that he may have some use for me. So the old man is likely to go at last, and we are to have the golden age again. If talking could do it, assuredly we should. He has noble instincts, this young fellow, and some sense. He has sent for me. If H——, and B——, and Von U——, and myself can but get his ear!

"Oh, Rhineland! my own beloved Rhineland, shall I see you again? Shall I sit once more in my own grey castle, among the vineyards, above the broad gleaming river, and hear the noises from the town come floating softly up the hillside! I wonder are there any left who will remember—"

He took two short turns through the room, and then he turned and spoke to them again, looking all the time at Sam.

"I am the Baron von Landstein. The very man we have so often talked of, and whose character we have so freely discussed. When the French attacked us, I threw myself into the foremost ranks of my countrymen, and followed the Queen with two regiments which I had raised almost entirely myself.

"I fled away from the blood-red sun of Jena, wounded and desperate. 'That sun,' I thought, 'has set on the ruins of Great Frederick's kingdom. Prussia is a province of France: what can happen worse than this? I will crawl home to my castle and die.'

"I had no castle to crawl to. My brother, he who hung upon the same breast with me, he who learnt his first

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prayer beside me, he whom I loved and trusted above all other men, had turned traitor, had sold himself to the French, had deceived my bride that was to be, and seized my castle.

"I fled to England, to Drumston, Major. I had some knowledge of physic, and called myself a doctor. I threw myself into the happy English domestic life which I found there, and soon got around me men and women whom I loved full well.

"Old John Thornton and his sister knew my secret, as did Lord Crediton; but they kept it well, and by degrees I began to hope that I would begin a new life as a useful village apothecary, and forget for ever the turmoils of politics.

"Then you know what happened. There was an Exodus. All those I had got to love, arose, in the manner of their nation, and went to the other end of the earth, so that one night I was left alone on the cliff at Plymouth, watching a ship which was bearing away all that was left me to love in the world.

"I went to Prussia. I found my brother had made good use of his prosperity, and slandered me to the King. His old treachery seemed forgotten, and he was high in power. The King, for whom I had suffered so much, received me coldly, and leaving the palace, I spoke to my brother, and said,—'Send me so much yearly, and keep the rest for a time.' And then I followed you, Major, out here.

"Shall I tell you any more, Sam?"

"No!" said Sam, smiting his fist upon the table. "I can tell the rest, Baron, to those who want to know it. I can tell of ten years' patient kindness towards myself. I can tell—I can tell—"

Sam was the worst orator in the world. He broke down, sir. He knew what he meant very well; and so I hope do you, reader, but he couldn't say it. He had done what many of us do, tried to make a fine speech when his heart was full, and so he failed.

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But Alice didn't fail,—not she, though she never spoke a word. She folded up her work; and going up to the good old man, took both his hands in hers and kissed him on both his cheeks. A fine piece of rhetorical action, wasn't it? And then they all crowded round him, and shook hands with him, and kissed him, and God-blessed him, for their kind, true, old friend; and prayed that every blessing might light upon his noble head, till he passed through them speechless and wandered away to his old friend, the river.

* * * * *

About the middle of this week, there arrived two of our former friends,—Frank Maberly and Captain Desborough, riding side by side. The Elders, with the Doctor, were outside, and detained the Dean, talking to him and bidding him welcome. But Captain Desborough, passing in, came into the room where were assembled Alice, Sam, and Jim, who gave him a most vociferous greeting.

They saw in a moment that there was some fun in the wind. They knew, by experience, that when Desborough's eyes twinkled like that, some absurdity was preparing, though they were quite unprepared for the mixture of reality and nonsense which followed.

"Pace," said Desborough, in his affected Irish accent, "be on this house, and all in it. The top of the morning to ye all."

"Now," said Alice, "we are going to have some fun; Captain Desborough has got his brogue on."

"Ye'll have some fun directly, Miss Brentwood," he said. "But there's some serious, sober earnest to come first. My cousin, Slievedonad, is dead."

"Lord Slievedonad?"

"The same. That small Viscount is at this moment in pur——. God forgive me, and him too."

"Poor fellow!"

"That's just half. My uncle Lord Covetown was taken with a fit when he heard of it, and is gone after him, and

the Lord forgive him too. He turned me, his own brother's son, out into the world with half an education, to sink or swim; and never a kind word did he or his son ever give me in their lives. It must have broken the old man's heart to think how the estate would go. But as I said before, God forgive him."

"You must feel his loss, Captain Desborough," said Alice. "I am very sorry for you."

"Ahem! my dear young lady, you don't seem to know how this ends."

"Why, no," said Alice, looking up wonderingly; "I do not."

"Why, it ends in this," said Desborough; "that I myself am Earl of Covetown, Viscount Slievedonad, and Baron Avoca, with twenty thousand a year, me darlin, the laste penny; see to there now!"

"Brogue again," said Alice. "Are you joking?"

"True enough," said Desborough. "I had a letter from my grandmother, the Dowager (she that lost the dog), only this very day. And there's a thousand pounds paid into the Bank of New South Wales to my account. Pretty good proof that last, eh?"

"My dear lord," said Alice, "I congratulate you most heartily. All the world are turning out to be noblemen. I should not be surprised to find that I am a duchess myself."

"It rests with you, Miss Brentwood," said Desborough, with a wicked glance at Sam, "to be a countess. I now formally make you an offer of me hand and heart. Oh! tell me, Miss Brentwood, will ye be Mrs. Mars—I beg pardon, Countess of Covetown?"

"No, I thank you, my lord," said Alice, laughing and blushing. "I am afraid I must decline."

"I was afraid ye would," said Lord Covetown. "I had heard that a great six-foot villain had been trifling with your affections, so I came prepared for a refusal. Came prepared with this, Miss Brentwood, which I pray you to

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accept ; shall I be too bold if I say, as a wedding present, from one of your most sincere admirers."

He produced a jewel case, and took from it a bracelet, at the sight of which Alice gave an honest womanly cry of delight. And well she might, for the bauble cost 150*l*. It was a bracelet of gold, representing a snake. Half-way up the reptile's back began a row of sapphires, getting larger towards the neck, each of which was surrounded by small emeralds. The back of the head contained a noble brilliant, and the eyes were two rubies. Altogether, a thorough specimen of Irish extravagance and good taste.

"Can you clasp it on for her, Sam?" said Lord Cove-town.

"Oh, my lord, I ought not to accept such a princely present!" said Alice.

"Look here, Miss Brentwood," said Covetown, laying his hand on Sam's shoulder. "I find that the noblest and best fellow I know is going to marry the handsomest woman, saving your presence, that I ever saw. I myself have just come into an earldom, and twenty thousand a-year; and if, under these circumstances, I mayn't make that woman a handsome present, why then the deuce is in it, you know. Sam, my boy, your hand. Jim, your hand, my lad. May you be as good a soldier as your father."

"Ah!" said Jim. "So you're an earl, are you? What does it feel like, eh? Do you feel the blue blood of a hundred sires coursing in your veins? Do you feel the hereditary class prejudices of the Norman aristocracy cutting you off from the sympathies of the inferior classes, and raising you above the hopes and fears of the masses? How very comical it must be! So you are going to sit among the big-wigs in the House of Lords. I hope you won't forget yourself, and cry 'Faug a Ballagh,' when one of the bishops rises to speak. And whatever you do, don't sing, 'Gama crem'ah cruiskeen' in the lobby."

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"My dear fellow," said he, "I am not in the House of Lords at all. Only an Irish peer. I intend to get into the Commons though, and produce a sensation by introducing the Australian 'Co'ee' into the seat of British Legislature."

How long these four would have gone on talking unutterable nonsense, no man can say. But Frank Maberly coming in, greeted them courteously, and changed the conversation.

Poor Frank! Hard and incessant work was beginning to tell on that noble frame, and the hard marked features were getting more hard and marked year by year. Yet, in spite of the deep lines that now furrowed that kindly face, those who knew it best, said that it grew more beautiful than it had ever been before. As that magnificent *physique* began to fail, the noble soul within began to show clearer through its earthly tenement. That noble soul was getting purified and ready for what happened but a few years after this in Patagonia. When we heard that that man had earned the crown of glory, and had been thought worthy to sit beside Stephen and Paul in the Kingdom; none of us wept for him, or mourned. It seemed such a fitting reward for such a pure and noble life. But even now, when I wake in the night, I see him before me as he was described in the last scene by the only survivor. Felled down upon the sand, with his arms before his eyes, crying out, as the spears struck him one after another, "Lord, forgive them, they know not what they do!"

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Chapter XX

In which Sam meets with a serious Accident, and gets crippled for Life

WHAT morning is this, when Sam, waking from silver dreams to a golden reality, turns over in his bed and looks out of the open glass door; at dog Rover, propped up against the lintel, chopping at the early flies; at the flower-garden, dark and dewy; at the black wall of forest beyond, in which the magpies were beginning to pipe cheerily; at the blessed dawn which was behind and above it, shooting long rays of primrose and crimson half-way up the zenith; hearing the sleepy ceaseless crawling of the river over the shingle bars; hearing the booming of the cattle-herds far over the plain; hearing the chirrup of the grasshopper among the raspberries, the chirr of the cicada among the wattles—what happy morning is this? Is it the Sabbath?

Ah, no! the Sabbath was yesterday. This is his wedding morn.

My dear brother bachelor, do you remember those old first-love sensations, or have you got too old, and too fat? Do you remember the night when you parted from her on the bridge by the lock, the night before her father wrote to you and forbade you the house? Have you got the rose she gave you there? Is it in your Bible, brother? Do you remember the months that followed—months of mad grief and wild yearning, till the yearning grew less—less wild—and the grief less desperate; and then, worst of all, the degrading consciousness that you were, in spite of yourself, getting rid of your love, and that she was not to you as she had been? Do you remember all this? When you come across the rose in your Bible, do you feel that you would give all the honour and wealth of the world to feel again those happy, wretched old sensations?

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Do you not say that this world has nothing to give in comparison to that?

Not this world, I believe. You and I can never feel that again. So let us make up our minds to it—it is dead. In God's name don't let us try to galvanize an old corpse, which may rise upon us hideous, and scare us to the lower pit. Let us be content as we are. Let us read that Book we spoke of just now with the rose in it; and imitate the Perfect Man there spoken of, who was crucified 1800 years ago, believing, like Him, that all men are our brothers, and acting up to it. And then, Lord knows what may be in store for us.

Here's a digression. If I had had a good wife to keep me in order, I never should have gone so far out of the road. Here is Sam in bed, sitting up, with his happy head upon his hands, trying to believe that this dream of love is going to be realized—trying to believe that it is really his wedding morn.

It evidently is; so he gets out of bed and says his prayers like an honest gentleman—he very often forgot to do this same, but he did it this morning carefully—much I am afraid as a kind of charm or incantation, till he came to the Lord's Prayer itself, and then his whole happy soul wedded itself to the eternal words, and he arose calm and happy, and went down to bathe.

Happy, I said. Was he really happy? He ought to have been; for every wish he had in this life was fulfilled. And yet, when Jim, and he, and Halbert, were walking, towel in hand, down the garden, they held this conversation:—

“Sam, my dear old brother, at last,” said Jim, “are you happy?”

“I ought to be, Jim,” said Sam; “but I'm in the most confounded fright, sir.”—They generally are in a fright, when they are going to be married, those Benedicts. What the deuce are they afraid of?

Our dear Jim was in anything but an enviable frame of

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mind. He had found out several things which did not at all conduce to his happiness ; he had found out that it was one thing to propose going to India, or No-man's-land, and cutting off every tie and association which he had in the world ; and that it was quite another thing to do that same. He had found out that it was one thing to leave his sister in the keeping of his friend Sam, and another to part from her probably for ever ; and, last of all, he had found out, ever since his father had put his arm round his neck and kissed him that night we know of, that he loved that father beyond all men in this world. It was a new discovery ; he had never known it till he found he had got to part with him. And now, when he woke in the night, our old merry-hearted Jim sat up in bed, and wept ; aye, and no shame to him for it, when he thought of that handsome, calm, bronzed face, tearless and quiet there, over the fortifications and the mathematics, when he was far away.

“ He will never say a word, Sam,” said Jim, as they were walking down to bathe this very morning of the wedding ; “ but he'll think the more. Sam, I am afraid I have done a selfish thing in going ; but if I were to draw back now, I should never be the same to him again. He couldn't stand that. But I am sorry I ever thought of it.”

“ I don't know, Jim,” said Halbert, pulling off his trousers, “ I really don't know of any act of parliament passed in favour of the Brentwood family, exempting them from the ordinary evils of humanity. Do you think now, that when John Nokes, aged nineteen, goes into market at Cambridge, or elsewhere, and 'lists, and never goes home again ; do you think, I say, that that lad don't feel a very strange emptiness about the epigastric region when he thinks of the grey-headed old man that is sitting waiting for him at the cottage-door ? And,” added Halbert, standing on the plunging-stage Adamically, without a rag upon him, pointing at Jim with his finger in an oratorical manner ; “ do you think that the old man who sits there,

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year after year, waiting for him who never comes, and telling the neighbours that his lad who is gone for a soldier, was the finest lad in the village, do you think that old man feels nothing? Give up fine feelings, Jim. You don't know what trouble is yet."

And so he went souse into the water.

And after the bathe all came up and dressed ;—white trousers and brilliant ties being the order of the day. Then we all, from the bachelor side of the house, assembled in the veranda, for the ceremony was not to be performed till eight, and it was not more than half-past seven. There was the promise of a very awkward half hour, so I was glad of a diversion caused by my appearing in a blue coat with gilt buttons, and pockets in the tails, —a coat I had not brought out for twenty years, but as good as new, I give you my honour. Jim was very funny about that coat, and I encouraged him by defending it, and so we got through ten minutes, and kept Sam amused. Then one of the grooms, a lad I mentioned before as bringing a note to Baroona on one occasion, a long brown-faced lad, born of London parents in the colony, made a diversion by coming round to look at us. He admired us very much, but my gilt buttons took his attention principally. He guessed they must have cost a matter of twenty pound, but on my telling him that the whole affair was bought for three pounds, he asked, I remember :—

"What are they made on, then?"

Brass I supposed, and gilt. So he left me in disgust, and took up with Jim's trousers, wanting to know, "if they was canvas."

"Satin velvet," Jim said ; and then the Major came out and beckoned us into the drawing-room.

And there she was, between Mrs. Buckley and Mary Hawker, dressed all in white, looking as beautiful as morning. Frank Maberly stood beside a little table, which the women had made into an altar, with the big Prayer-book in his hand. And we all stood around, and

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the servants thronged in, and Sam, taking Alice's hand, went up and stood before Frank Maberly.

Captain Brentwood, of the Artillery, would give this woman to be married to this man, with ten thousand blessings on her head ; and Samuel Buckley, of Baroona, would take this woman as his wedded wife, in sickness and health, for richer, for poorer, till death did them part. And, "Yes, by George, he will," says Jim to himself,—but I heard him, for we were reading out of the same Prayer-book.

And so it was all over. And the Doctor, who had all the morning been invisible, and had only slipt into the room just as the ceremony had begun, wearing on his coat a great star, a prodigy, which had drawn many eyes from their Prayer-books, the Doctor, I say, came up, star and all, and taking Alice's hand, kissed her forehead, and then clasped a splendid necklace round her throat.

Then followed all the usual kissings and congratulations, and then came the breakfast. I hope Alice and Sam were happy, as happy as young folks can be in such a state of flutter and excitement ; but all I know is, that the rest of the party were thoroughly and utterly miserable. The certainty that this was the break-up of our happy old society, that all that was young, and merry, and graceful, among us, was about to take wing and leave us old folks sitting there lonely and dull. The thought, that neither Baroona nor Garoopna could ever be again what they had once been, and that never again we should hear those merry voices, wakening us in the morning, or ringing pleasant by the river on the soft summer's evening ; these thoughts, I say, made us but a dull party, although Covetown and the Doctor made talking enough for the rest of us.

There was something I could not understand about the Doctor. He talked loud and nervously all breakfast time, and afterwards, when Alice retired to change her dress, and we were all standing about talking, he came up to me

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in a quiet corner where I was, and took me by the hand. "My dear old friend," he said, "you will never forget me, will you?"

"Forget you, Baron! never," I said. I would have asked him more, but there was Alice in the room, in her pretty blue riding-habit and hat, ready for a start, and Sam beside her, whip in hand; so we all crowded out to say good-bye.

That was the worst time of all. Mrs. Buckley had said farewell and departed. Jim was walking about, tearless, but quite unable to answer me when I asked him a question. Those two grim old warriors, the Captain and the Major, were taking things very quietly, but did not seem inclined to talk much, while the Doctor was conducting himself like an amiable lunatic, getting in everybody's way as he followed Sam about.

"Sam," he said, after Alice had been lifted on her horse, "my dear Sam, my good pupil, you will never forget your old tutor, will you?"

"Never, never!" said Sam; "not likely, if I lived to be a hundred. I shall see you to-morrow."

"Oh yes, surely," said the Baron; "we shall meet to-morrow for certain. But good-bye, my boy; good-bye."

And then the young couple rode away to Baroona, which was empty, swept, and garnished, ready for their reception. And the servants cheered them as they went away, and tall Eleanor sent one of her husband's boots after them for luck, with such force and dexterity that it fell close to the heels of Widderin, setting him capering;—then Sam turned round and waved his hat, and they were gone.

And we turned round to look at one another, and lo! another horse, the Doctor's, was being led up and down by a groom, saddled; and, while we wondered, out came the Doctor himself and began strapping his valise on to the saddle.

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“ And where are you going to-day, Baron ? ” asked the Major.

“ I am going,” said he, “ to Sydney. I sail for Europe in a week.”

Our astonishment was too great for ejaculations ; we kept an awful silence ; this was the first hint he had given us of his intention.

“ Yes,” said he, “ I sail from Sydney this day week. I could not embitter my boy’s wedding-day by letting him know that he was to lose me ; better that he should come back and find me gone. I must go, and I foresaw it when the letter came ; but I would not tell you, because I knew you would be so sorry to part. I have been inside and said farewell to Mrs. Buckley. And now, my friends, shorten this scene for me. Night and day, for a month, I have been dreading it, and now let us spare one another. Why should we tear our hearts asunder by a long leave-taking ? Oh, Buckley, Buckley ! after so many years—”

Only a hurried shaking of hands, and he was gone. Down by the paddock to the river, and when he reached the height beyond, he turned and waved his hand. Then he went on his way across the old plains, and we saw him lessening in the distance until he disappeared altogether, and we saw him no more. No more !

In two months from that time Jim and Halbert were gone to India, Sam and Alice were away to the Darling Downs, Desborough and the Doctor had sailed for Europe, and we old folks, taking up our residence at Baroona, had agreed to make common house of it. Of course we were very dull at first, when we missed half of the faces which had been used to smile upon us ; but this soon wore off. During the succeeding winter I remember many pleasant evenings, when the Captain, the Major, Mrs. Buckley, and myself played whist, shilling points and the rigour of the game, and while Mary Hawker, in her widow’s weeds, sat sewing by the fireside, contentedly enough.

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Chapter XXI

How Mary Hawker said "Yes"

IT was one evening during the next spring, and the game of whist was over for the night. The servant had just brought in tumblers with a view to whiskey and water before bed. I was preparing to pay fourteen shillings to Mrs. Buckley, and was rather nervous about meeting my partner, the Major's eye, when he, tapping the table with his hand, spoke :—

"The most childish play, Hamlyn; the most childish play."

"I don't defend the last game," I said. "I thought you were short of diamonds—at least I calculated on the chance of your being so, having seven myself. But please to remember, Major, that you yourself lost two tricks in hearts, in the first game of the second rubber."

"And why, sir?" said the Major. "Tell me that, sir. Because you confused me by leading queen, when you had ace, king, queen. The most utterly schoolboy play. I wouldn't have done such a thing at Eton."

"I had a flush of them," I said eagerly. "And I meant to lead ace, and then get trumps out. But I put down queen by mistake."

"You can make what excuses you like, Hamlyn," said the Major. "But the fact remains the same. There is one great fault in your character, the greatest fault I know of, and which you ought to study to correct. I tell you of it boldly as an old friend. You are too confoundedly chary in leading out your trumps, and you can't deny it."

"Hallo!" said Captain Brentwood, "who comes so late?"

Mary Hawker rose from her chair, and looked eagerly towards the door. "I know who it is," she said, blushing. "I heard him laugh."

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In another moment the door was thrown open, and in stalked Tom Troubridge.

"By George!" he said. "Don't all speak to me at once. I feel the queerest wambling in my innards, as we used to say in Devon, at the sight of so many old faces. Somehow, a man can't make a new home in a hurry. It's the people make the home, not the house and furniture. My dear old cousin, and how are you?"

"I am very quiet, Tom. I am much happier than I thought to have been. And I am deeply thankful to see you again."

"How is my boy, Tom?" said the Major.

"And how is my girl, Tom?" said the Captain.

"Sam," said Tom, "is a sight worth a guinea, and Mrs. Samuel looks charming, but— In point of fact, you know, I believe she expects—"

"No!" said the Captain. "You don't say so."

"Fact, my dear sir."

"Dear me," said the Major, drumming on the table. "I hope it will be a b—. By-the-bye, how go the sheep?"

"You never saw such a country, sir!" said Tom. "We have got nearly five thousand on each run, and there is no one crowding up yet. If we can hold that ground with our produce, and such store-sheep as we can pick up, we shall do wonders."

By this time Tom was at supper, and between the business of satisfying a hunger of fifteen hours, began asking after old friends.

"How are the Mayfords?" he asked.

"Poor Mrs. Mayford is better," said Mrs. Buckley. "She and Ellen are just starting for Europe. They have sold their station, and we have bought it."

"What are they going to do in England?" asked Tom.

"Going to live with their relations in Hampshire."

"Ellen will be a fine match for some young English squire," said Tom. "She will have twenty thousand pounds some day, I suppose."

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And then we went on talking about other matters.

A little scene took place in the garden next morning, which may astonish some of my readers, but which did not surprise me in the least. I knew it would happen, sooner or later, and when I saw Tom's air, on his arrival the night before, I said to myself, "It is coming," and so sure enough it did. And I got all the circumstances out of Tom only a few days afterwards.

Mary Hawker was now a very handsome woman, about one and forty. There may have been a grey hair here and there among her long black tresses, but they were few and far between. I used to watch her sometimes of an evening, and wonder to myself how she had come through such troubles, and lived; and yet there she was on the night when Tom arrived, for instance, sitting quite calm and cheerful beside the fire in her half-mourning (she had soon dropped her weeds, perhaps, considering who her husband had been, a piece of good taste), with quite a placid, contented look on her fine black eyes. I think no one was capable of feeling deeper for a time, but her power of resilience was marvellous. I have noticed that before. It may, God forgive me, have given me some slight feeling of contempt for her, because, forsooth, she did not brood over and nurse an old grief as I did myself. I am not the man to judge her. When I look back on my own wasted life; when I see how for one boyish fancy I cut myself off from all the ties of domestic life, to hold my selfish way alone, I sometimes think that she has shown herself a better woman than I have a man. Ah! well, old sweetheart, not much to boast of either of us. Let us get on.

She was walking in the garden next morning, and Tom came and walked beside her; and after a little he said,—

"So you are pretty well contented, cousin?"

"I am as well content," she said, "as a poor, desolate, old childless widow could hope to be. There is no happiness left for me in this life!"

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"Who told you that?" said Tom. "Who told you that the next twenty years of your life might not be happier than any that have gone before?"

"How could that be?" she asked. "What is left for me now, but to go quietly to my grave?"

"Grave!" said Tom. "Who talks of graves for twenty years to come! Mary, my darling, I have waited for you so long and faithfully, you will not disappoint me at last?"

"What do you mean? What can you mean?"

"Mean!" said he; "why, I mean this, cousin: I mean you to be my wife—to come and live with me as my honoured wife, for the next thirty years, please God!"

"You are mad!" she said. "Do you know what you say? Do you know who you are speaking to?"

"To my old sweetheart, Polly Thornton!" he said, with a laugh,—“to no one else in the world.”

"You are wrong," she said; "you may try to forget now, but you will remember afterwards. I am not Mary Thornton. I am an old broken woman, whose husband was transported for coining, and hung for murder, and worse!"

"Peace be with him!" said Tom. "I am not asking who your husband was; I have had twenty years to think about that, and at the end of twenty years, I say, my dear old sweetheart, you are free at last: will you marry me?"

"Impossible!" said Mary. "All the country-side knows who I am. Think of the eternal disgrace that clings to me. Oh, never, never!"

"Then you have no objection to me? eh, cousin?"

"To you, my kind, noble old partner? Ah, I love and honour you above all men!"

"Then," said Tom, putting his arm round her waist, "to the devil with all the nonsense you have just been talking, about eternal disgraces and so forth! I am an honest man and you're an honest woman, and, therefore,

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what cause or impediment can there be? Come, Mary, it's no use resisting; my mind is made up, and you *must!*"

"Oh, think!" she said; "oh, think only once, before it is too late for ever!"

"I have thought," said Tom, "as I told you before, for twenty years; and I ain't likely to alter my opinion in ten minutes. Come, Mary. Say, yes!"

And so she said yes.

"Mrs. Buckley," said Tom, as they came up arm in arm to the house, "it will be a good thing if somebody was to go up to our place, and nurse Mrs. Sam in her confinement."

"I shall go up myself," said Mrs. Buckley, "though how I am to get there I hardly know. It must be nearly eight hundred miles, I am afraid."

"I don't think you need, my dear madam," said he. "My wife will make an excellent nurse!"

"Your wife!"

Tom looked at Mary, who blushed, and Mrs. Buckley came up and kissed her.

"I am so glad, so very glad, my love!" she said. "The very happiest and wisest thing that could be! I have been hoping for it, my love, and I felt sure it would be so, sooner or later. How glad your dear aunt would be if she were alive!"

And, in short, he took her off with him, and they were married, and went up to join Sam and his wife in New England—reducing our party to four. Not very long after they were gone, we heard that there was a new Sam Buckley born, who promised, said the wise woman, to be as big a man as his father. Then, at an interval of very little more than two years, Mrs. Buckley got a long letter from Alice, announcing the birth of a little girl to the Troubridges. This letter is still extant, and in my possession, having been lent me, among other family papers, by Agnes Buckley, as soon as she heard that I was bent upon

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correcting these memoirs to fit them for the press. I will give you some extracts from it :—

... “ Dear Mary Troubridge has got a little girl, a sweet, quiet, brighteyed little thing, taking, I imagine, after old Miss Thornton. They are going to call it Agnes Alice, after you and I, my dearest mother.

“ You cannot image how different Mary is grown from what she used to be ! Stout, merry, and matronly, quite ! She keeps the house alive, and I think I never saw a couple more sincerely attached than are she and her husband. He is a most excellent companion for my Sam. Not to make matters too long, we are just about as happy as four people can be. Some day we may all come to live together again, and then our delight will be perfect.

“ I got Jim’s letter which you sent me. . . . Sam and his partner are embarking every sixpence they can spare in buying town and suburban lots at Melbourne. I know every street and alley in that wonderful city (containing near a hundred houses) on the map, but I am not very likely to go there ever. Let us hope that Sam’s speculations will turn out profitable.

“ Best love to Mr. Hamlyn.” . . .

I must make a note to this letter. Alice refers to a letter received from Jim, which, as near as I can make the dates agree, must be the one I hold in my hand at this moment. I am not sure, but I think so. This one runs—

“ Dear Dad, . . . I have been down among the dead men, and since then up into the seventh heaven, in consequence of being not only gazetted, but promoted. The beggars very nearly did for us. All our fortifications, the prettiest things ever done under the circumstances, executed under Bobby’s own eye, were thrown down by—what do you think ?—an earthquake ! Perhaps we didn’t swear—Lord forgive us ! Akbar had a shy at us immediately, but got a most immortal licking !

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"Is not this a most wonderful thing about Halbert? The girl that he was to be married to was supposed to be lost, coming out in the Assam. And now it appears that she wasn't lost at all (the girl I mean, not the ship), but that she was wrecked on the east coast of Madagascar, and saved, with five and twenty more. She came on to Calcutta, and they were married the week after he got his troop. She is uncommonly handsome and ladylike, but looks rather brown and lean from living on birds' nests and sea-weed for above six months of her life."

[Allow me to remark that this must be romance on Jim's part; birds' nests and trepang are not found in Madagascar.]

"My wound is nearly all right again. It was only a prick with a spear in my thigh—"

It is the very deuce editing these old letters without anything to guide me. As far as I can make out by myself (Jim being now down at Melton, hunting, and not having answered my letter of inquiries), this letter must have come accompanied by an Indian newspaper containing the account of some battle or campaign in which he was engaged. Putting this and that together, I am inclined to believe that it refers to the defence of Jellalabad by Sir Robert Sale, in which I know he was engaged. I form this opinion from the fact of his mentioning that the fortifications were destroyed by an earthquake. And I very much fear that the individual so disrespectfully mentioned above as "Bobby," was no other than the great Hero himself. In my second (or if that goes off too quick, in my third) edition, I will endeavour to clear this point up in a satisfactory manner.

After this time there was a long dull time with no news from him or from any one. Then Sam came down from New England, and paid us a visit, which freshened us up a little. But in spite of this and other episodes, there was little change or excitement for us four. We made com-

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mon house of it, and never parted from one another more than a day. Always of an evening came the old friendly rubber, I playing with the Major, and Captain Brentwood with Mrs. Buckley. The most remarkable event I have to chronicle during the long period which followed, is, that one day a bushfire came right up to the garden rails, and was beaten out with difficulty ; and that same evening I held nine trumps, Ace, Queen, Knave, Nine of hearts, and the rest small. I cannot for the life of me remember what year it was in, somewhere between forty-two and forty-five, I believe, because within a year or two of that time we heard that a large comet had appeared in England, and that Sir Robert Peel was distrusted on the subject of Protection. After all, it is no great consequence, though it is rather provoking, because I never before or since held more than eight trumps. Burnside, the cattle-dealer, claims to have had eleven, but I may state, once for all, that I doubt that man's statements on this and every other subject on which he speaks.—He knows where I am to be found.

My man Dick, too, somehow or another constituted himself my groom and valet. And the Major was well contented with the arrangement. So we four, Major and Mrs. Buckley, Captain Brentwood and I, sat there in the old station night after night, playing our whist, till even my head, the youngest of the four, began to be streaked with grey, and sixteen years were past.

Chapter XXII

The latest Intelligence

IT is March, 1856. The short autumn day is rapidly giving place to night ; and darkness, and the horror of a great tempest, is settling down upon the desolate grey sea, which heaves and seethes for ever around Cape Horn.

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A great clipper ship, the noblest and swiftest of her class, is hurling along her vast length before the terrible west wind. Hour by hour through the short and gloomy day, sail after sail has gone fluttering in ; till now, at night-fall, she reels and rolls before the storm under a single, close reefed, maintopsail.

There is a humming, and a roaring, and a rushing of great waters, so that they who are clinging to the bulwarks, and watching, awestruck, this great work of the Lord's, cannot hear one another though they shout. Now there is a grey mountain which chases the ship, overtakes her, pours cataracts of water over her rounded stern, and goes hissing and booming past her. And now a roll more frantic than usual, nigh dips her mainyard, and sends the water spouting wildly over her bulwarks.

("Oh, you very miserable ass," said Captain Brentwood ; "to sit down and try to describe the indescribable. Do you think that because you can see all the scene before you now, because your flesh creeps, and your blood moves, as you call it to mind, do you think, I say, that you can describe it? Do you think that you can give a man, in black and white, with ink, and on paper, any real notion of that most tremendous spectacle, a sharp-bowed ship running before a gale of wind through the ice in the great South Sea, where every wave rolls round the world? Go to—read Tom Cringle, who has given up his whole soul to descriptions, and see how many pictures dwell in your mind's eye, after reading his books. Two, or at most three, and they, probably, quite different from what he intended you to see, lovely as they are ;—leave describing things, man, and give us some more facts."

Said Major Buckley, "Go on, Hamlyn, and do the best you can. Don't mind him." And so I go on accordingly.)

61° 30'' South. The Horn, storm-beaten, desolate, four hundred miles to the North, and barely forty miles to the South, that cruel, gleaming, ice barrier, which we saw to-

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day when the weather lifted at noon, and which we know is there yet, though we dare not think about it. There comes to us, though, in spite of ourselves, a vision of what may happen at any hour. A wild cry from the foretop. A mass, grey, indistinct, horrible, rising from the wild waters, scarce a hundred yards from her bowsprit. A mad hurrying to and fro. A crash. A great ruin of masts and spars, and then utter, hopeless destruction. That is the way the poor old Madagascar must have gone. The Lord send us safe through the ice.

Stunned, drenched to the skin, half-frightened, but wildly excited and determined to see out, what a landsman has but seldom a chance of seeing, a great gale of wind at sea, I clung tight to the starboard bulwarks of Mr. Richard Green's new clipper, Sultan, Captain Sneezer, about an hour after dark, as she was rounding the Horn, watching much such a scene as I have attempted to give you a notion of above. And as I held on there, wishing that the directors of my insurance office could see me at that moment, the first mate, coming from forward, warping himself from one belayingpin to another, roared in my ear, "that he thought it was going to blow."

"Man! man!" I said, "do you mean to tell me it is not blowing now?"

"A bit of a breeze," he roared; but his roar came to me like a whisper. However, I pretty soon found out that this was something quite out of the common; for, crawling up, along the gangway which runs between the poophouse and the bulwarks, I came with great difficulty to the stern; and there I saw the two best men in the larboard watch (let us immortalize them, they were Deaf Bob, and Harry the digger), lashed to the wheel, and the skipper himself, steadfast and anxious, alongside of them, lashed to a cleat on the afterpart of the deck-house. So thinks I, if these men are made fast, this is no place for me to be loose in, and crawled down to my old place in the waist, at the after end of the spare topsail-yard, which

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was made fast to the starboard bulwarks, and which extended a little abaft of the main shrouds.

If any gentleman can detect a nautical error in that last sentence, I shall feel obliged by his mentioning it.

Somebody who came forth from the confusion, and was gone again, informed me that "He* was going to lay her to, and that I'd better hold on." I comforted myself with the reflection that I was doing exactly the right thing, holding on like grim death.

Then something happened, and I am sorry to say I don't exactly know what. I find in my notes, taken shortly afterwards, from the dictation of an intelligent midshipman, "that the fore-royal yard got jammed with the spanker-boom, and carried away the larboard quarter-boat." Nautical friends have since pointed out to me that this involves an impossibility. I daresay it does. I know it involved an impossibility of turning in without subjecting yourself to a hydropathic remedy of violent nature, by going to bed in wet blankets, and of getting anything for breakfast besides wet biscuit and cold tea. Let it go; something went wrong, and the consequences were these.

A wall of water, looming high above her mainyard, came rushing and booming along, dark, terrible, opaque. For a moment I saw it curling overhead, and would have cried out, I believe, had there been time; but a midshipman, a mere child, slipped up before me, and caught hold of my legs, while I tried to catch his collar. Then I heard the skipper roar out, in that hoarse throaty voice that seamen use when excited, "Hold on, the sea's aboard," and then a stunning, blinding rush of water buried us altogether. The Sultan was on her beam-ends, and what was more, seemed inclined to stay there, so that I, holding on by the bulwarks, saw the sea seething and boiling almost beneath my feet, which were swinging clear off the deck.

But the midshipman sung out that she was righting again, which she did rather quicker than was desirable,

* "He," on board ship, always means "the skipper."

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bringing every loose article on deck down to our side again with a rush. A useless, thundering, four-pounder gun, of which terrible implements of war we carried six, came plunging across from the other side of the deck, and went crashing through the bulwarks, out into the sea, within two feet of my legs.

"I think," I said, trying to persuade myself that I was not frightened, "I think I shall go into the cuddy."

That was not very easy to do. I reached the door, and got hold of the handle, and, watching my opportunity, slipped dexterously in, and making a plunge, came against the surgeon, who, seated on a camp-stool, was playing piquette, and overthrew him into a corner.

"Repique, by jingo," shouted Sam Buckley, who was the surgeon's opponent. "See what a capital thing it is to have an old friend like Hamlyn, to come in and knock your opponent down just at the right moment."

"And papa was losing, too, Uncle Jeff," added a handsome lad, about fifteen, who was leaning over Sam's shoulder.

"What are they doing to you, Doctor?" said Alice Buckley, *née* Brentwood, coming out of a cabin, and supporting herself to a seat by her husband and son.

"Why," replied the surgeon, "Hamlyn knocked me down just in a moment of victory, but his nefarious project has failed, for I have kept possession of my cards. Play, Buckley."

Let us give a glance at the group which is assembled beneath the swing lamp in the reeling cabin. The wife and son are both leaning over the father's shoulder, and the three faces are together. Sam is about forty. There is not a wrinkle in that honest forehead, and the eyes beam upon you as kindly and pleasantly as ever they did; and when, after playing to the surgeon, he looks up and laughs, one sees that he is just the same old Sam that used to lie, as a lad, dreaming in the veranda at Garoopna. No trouble has left its shadow there. Alice, whose face is

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pressed against his, is now a calm young matron of three or four-and-thirty, if it were possible, more beautiful than ever, only she has grown from a Hebe into a Juno. The boy, the son and heir, is much such a stripling as I can remember his father at the same age, but handsomer. And while we look, another face comes peering over his shoulder; the laughing face of a lovely girl, with bright sunny hair, and soft blue eyes; the face of Maud Buckley, Sam's daughter.

They are going home to England. Sam—what between his New England runs, where there are now, under Tom Troubridge's care, 118,000 sheep, and his land speculations at Melbourne, which have turned him out somewhere about 1,000 per cent. since the gold discovery—Sam, I say, is one of the richest of her Majesty's subjects in the Southern hemisphere. I would give 200,000*l.* for Sam, and make a large fortune in the surplus. "And so," I suppose you say, "he is going home to buy Clere." Not at all, my dear sir. Clere is bought, and Sam is going home to take possession. "Marry, how?" Thus,—

Does any one of my readers remember that our dear old friend Agnes Buckley's maiden name was Talbot, and that her father owned the property adjoining Clere? "We do not remember," you say; "or at least, if we do, we are not bound to; you have not mentioned the circumstance since the very beginning of this excessively wearisome book, forty years ago." Allow me to say, that I have purposely avoided mentioning them all along, in order that, at this very point, I might come down on you like a thunderbolt with this piece of information; namely:—That Talbot of Beaulieu Castle, the towers of which were visible from Clere Terrace, had died without male issue. That Marian and Gertrude Talbot, the two pretty girls, Agnes Buckley's eldest sisters, who used to come in and see old Marmaduke when James was campaigning, had never married. That Marian was dead. That Gertrude, a broken old maid, was sole owner of Beaulieu Castle, with eight thousand a-

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year ; and that Agnes Buckley, her sister, and consequently, Sam as next in succession, was her heir.*

All the negotiations for the purchase of Clere had been carried on through Miss Gertrude and her steward. The brewer died, the property was sold, and Sam, by his agents, bought old Clere back, eight months before this, for 48,000*l*.

"Then, why on earth," says Mrs. Councillor Wattlegum (our colonial Mrs. Grundy), "didn't they go home overland? How could people with such wealth as you describe, demean themselves by going home round the Horn, like a parcel of diggers?"

"Because, my dear Madam, the young folks were very anxious to see an iceberg. Come, let us get on."

The gale has lasted three days, and in that time we have run before it on our course 970 miles. The fourth morning breaks gloriously bright, with the shadows of a few fleecy clouds flying across the bright blue heaving sea. The ship, with all canvas crowded on her, alow and aloft, is racing on, fifteen knots an hour, with a brisk cold wind full on her quarter, heeling over till the water comes rushing and spouting through her leeward ports, and no man can stand without holding on, but all are merry and happy to see the water fly past like blue champagne, and to watch the seething wake that the good ship leaves behind her. Ah! what is this, that all are crowding down to leeward to look at? Is this the Crystal Palace, of which we have read, come out to sea to meet us? No! the young folks are going to be gratified. It is a great iceberg, and we shall pass about a mile to windward.

Certainly worth seeing. Much more tremendous than I

* If you will examine the most successful of our modern novels, you will find that the great object of the author is to keep the reader in a continual state of astonishment. Following this rule, I give myself great credit for this *coup de théâtre*. I am certain that the most experienced novel reader could not have foreseen it. I may safely say that none of my readers will be half so much astonished as I was myself.

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had expected, though my imagination had rather run riot in expectation. Just a great floating cluster of shining splintered crystals, about a mile long and 300 feet high, with the cold hungry sea leaping and gnawing at its base,—that is all. Send up those German musicians here, and let us hear the echo of one of Strauss' Waltzes come ringing back from the chill green caverns. Then away; her head is northward again now, we may sight the Falklands the day after to-morrow.

Hardly worth telling you much more about that happy voyage, I think, and really I remember but few things more of note. A great American ship in 45°, steaming in the teeth of the wind, heaving her long gleaming sides through the roll of the South Atlantic. The Royal Charter* passing us like a phantom ship through the hot haze, when we were becalmed on the line, waking the silence of the heaving glassy sea with her throbbing propeller. A valiant vain-glorious little gun-boat going out all the way to China by herself, giving herself the airs of a seventy-four, requiring boats to be sent on board her, as if we couldn't have stowed her, guns and all, on our poop, and never crowded ourselves! A noble transport, with 53 painted on her bows, swarming with soldiers for India, to whom we gave three times three. All these things have faded from my recollection in favour of a bright spring morning in April.

A morning which, beyond all others in my life, stands out clear and distinct, as the most memorable. Jim Buckley shoved aside my cabin door when I was dressing, and says he,—“Uncle Jeff, my Dad wants you immediately; he is standing by the davits of the larboard quarterboat.”

And so I ran up to Sam, and he took my arm and pointed northward. Over the gleaming morning sea rose a purple mountain, shadowed here and there by travelling

* Alas! alas! how little did I think that in my second edition, I should have to remind my readers that this, the most beautiful of ships, had perished on the coast of Anglesey, with her 500 souls!

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clouds; and a little red-sailed boat was diving and plunging towards us, with a red flag fluttering on her masts.

"What!" I said,—but I could say no more.

"The Lizard!"

But I could not see it now for a blinding haze, and I bent down my head upon the bulwarks—Bah! I am but a fool after all. What could there have been to cry at in a Cornish moor, and a Falmouth pilot boat? I am not quite so young as I was, and my nerves are probably failing. That must have been it. "When I saw the steeple," says M. Tapley, "I thought it would have choked me." Let me say the same of Eddystone Lighthouse, which we saw that afternoon; and have done with sentiment for good. If my memory serves me rightly, we have had a good deal of that sort of thing in the preceding pages.

I left the ship at Plymouth, and Sam went on in her to London. I satisfied my soul with amazement at the men of war, and the breakwater; and, having bought a horse, I struck boldly across the moor for Drumston, revisiting on my way many a well-known snipe-ground, and old trout-haunt; and so, on the third morning, I reached Drumston once more, and stabled my horse at a little public-house near the church.

It was about eight o'clock on a Tuesday morning; nevertheless, the church-bell was going, and the door was open as if for prayer. I was a little surprised at this, but having visited the grave where my father and mother lay, and then passed on to the simple headstone which marked the resting place of John Thornton and his wife, I brushed through the docks and nettles, towards the lychgate, in the shadow of which stood the clergyman, a gentlemanly looking young man, talking to a very aged woman in a red cloak.

He saluted me courteously, and passed on, talking earnestly and kindly to his aged companion, and so the remarkable couple went into the church, and the bell stopped.

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I looked around. Close to me, leaning against the gate, was a coarse looking woman about fifty, who had just set down a red earthen pitcher to rest herself, and seemed not disinclined for a gossip. And at the same moment I saw a fat man, about my own age, with breeches unbuttoned at the knee, grey worsted stockings and slippers, and looking altogether as if he was just out of bed, having had too much to drink the night before; such a man, I say, I saw coming across the road, towards us, with his hands in his pockets.

"Good morning," I said to the woman. "Pray what is the clergyman's name?"

"Mr. Montague," she answered, with a curtsy.

"Does he have prayers every morning?"

"Every marnin' of his life," she said. "He's a Papis-ter."

"You'm a fool, Cis Jewell," said the man, who had by this time arrived. "You'm leading the gentleman wrong, he's a Pussyite."

"And there bain't much difference, I'm thinking, James Gosford," said Cis Jewell.

I started. James Gosford had been one of my favourite old comrades in times gone by, and here he was. Could it be he? Could this fat red-faced man of sixty-one, be the handsome hard-riding young dandy of forty years ago? It was he, doubtless, and in another moment I should have declared myself, but a new interruption occurred.

The bell began again, and service was over. The old woman came out of the porch and slowly down the path towards us.

"Is that all his congregation?" I asked.

"That's all, sir," said Gosford. "Sometimes some of they young villains of boys gets in, and our old clerk, Jerry, hunts 'em round and round all prayer time; but there's none goes regular except the old 'ooman."

"And she had need to pray a little more than other

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folks," said Cis Jewell, folding her arms, and balancing herself in a conversational attitude. "My poor old grandfather——"

Further conversation was stopped by the near approach of the old woman herself, and I looked up at her with some little curiosity. A very old woman she was surely; and while I seemed struggling with some sort of recollection, she fixed her eyes upon me, and we knew one another.

"Geoffry Hamlyn," she said, without a sign of surprise. "You are welcome back to your native village. When your old comrade did not know you, I, whose eyes are dim with the sorrow of eighty years, recognised you at once. They may well call me the wise woman."

"Good God!" was all I could say. "Can this be Madge?"

"This is Madge," she said, "who has lived long enough to see and to bless the man who saw and comforted her poor lost boy in prison, when all beside fell off from him. The Lord reward you for it."

"How did you know that, Madge?"

"Ask a witch where she gets her information!" laughed she. "God forgive me. I'll tell you how it was. One of the turnkeys in that very prison was a Cooper, a Hampshire gipsy, and he, knowing my boy to be half-blooded, passed all the facts on through the tribes to me, who am a mother among them! Did you see him die?" she added, eagerly putting her great bony hand upon my arm, and looking up in my face.

"No! no! mother," I answered: "I hadn't courage for that."

"I heard he died game," she continued, half to herself. "He should a done. There was a deal of wild blood in him from both sides. Are you going up to the woodlands, to see the old place? 'Tis all in ruins now; and the choughs and staves are building and brooding in the chimney nook where I nursed him. I shall not have much longer to wait; I only stayed for this. Good-bye."

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And she was gone; and Gosford, relieved by her departure, was affectionately lugging me off to his house. Oh, the mixture of wealth and discomfort that house exhibited! Oh, the warm-hearted jollity of every one there! Oh, to see those three pretty, well-educated girls taking their father off by force, and making him clean himself in honour of my arrival! Oh, the merry evening we had! What, though the cider disagreed with me? What, though I knew it would disagree with me at the time I drank it? That noisy, jolly night in the old Devonshire grange was one of the pleasantest of my life.

And, to my great surprise, the Vicar came in in the middle of it, and made himself very agreeable to me. He told me that old Madge, as far as he could see, was a thoroughly converted and orderly person, having thrown aside all pretence of witchcraft. That she lived on some trifle of hoarded money of her own, and a small parish allowance that she had; and that she had only come back to the parish some six years since, after wandering about as a gipsy in almost every part of England. He was so good as to undertake the delivery of a small sum to her weekly from me, quite sufficient to enable her to refuse the parish allowance, and live comfortably (he wrote to me a few months afterwards, and told me that it was required no longer, for that Madge was gone to rest at last); and a good deal more news he gave me, very little of which is interesting here.

He told me that Lord C——, John Thornton's friend, was dead; that he never thoroughly got over the great Reform debate, in which he over-exerted himself; and that, after the passing of that Bill, he had walked joyfully home and had a fit, which prevented his ever taking any part in politics afterwards, though he lived above ten years. That his son was not so popular as his father, in consequence of his politics, which were too conservative for the new class of tenants his father had brought in; and his religious opinions, which, said the clergyman, were

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those of a sound Churchman ; by which he meant, I rather suspect, that he was a pretty smart Tractarian. I was getting won with this young gentleman, in spite of religious difference, when he chose to say that the parish had never been right since Maberly had it, and that the Dissenters always raved about him to this day ; whereby, he concluded, that Frank Maberly was far from orthodox. I took occasion to say that Frank was the man of all others in this world whom I admired most, and that, considering he had sealed his faith with his life, I thought that he ought to be very reverently spoken of. After this there arose a little coolness, and he went home.

I went up to town by the Great Western, and, for the first time, knew what was meant by railway travelling. True, I had seen and travelled on that monument of human industry, the Hobson's Bay Railroad, but that stupendous work hardly prepared me for the Great Western. And on this journey I began to understand, for the first time in my life, what a marvellous country this England of ours was. I wondered at the wealth and traffic I saw, even in comparatively unimportant towns. I wondered at the beauty and solidity of the railway works ; at the vast crowds of people which I saw at every station ; at the manly, independent bearing of the men of the working classes, which combined so well with their civility and intelligence ; and I thought, with a laugh, of the fate of any eighty thousand men who might shove their noses into this bee-hive, while there was such material to draw upon. Such were the thoughts of an Englishman landing in England, from whom the evils produced by dense population were as yet hidden.

But when I got into the whirl of London, I was completely overwhelmed and stupefied. I did not enjoy anything. The eternal roar was so different to what I had been used to ; and I had stayed there a couple of months before I had got a distinct impression of anything, save and except the Crystal Palace at Sydenham.

It was during this visit to London that I heard of the fall of Von Landstein's (Dr. Mulhaus') Ministry, which had happened a year or two before. And now, also, I read the speech he made on his resignation, which, for biting sarcasm and bitter truth rudely told, is unequalled by any speech I ever read. A more witty, more insolent, more audacious tirade, was never hurled at a successful opposition by a fallen minister. The K—— party sat furious, as one by one were seized on by our ruthless friend, held up to ridicule, and thrown aside. They, however, meditated vengeance.

Our friend, in the heat of debate, used the word, "Dummkopf," which answers, I believe, to our "wooden head." He applied it to no one in particular; but a certain young nobleman (Bow-wow Von Azelsberg was his name) found the epithet so applicable to his own case, that he took umbrage at it; and, being egged on by his comrades, challenged Von Landstein to mortal combat. Von Landstein received his fire without suffering, adjusted his spectacles, and shot the young gentleman in the knee, stopping *his* waltzing for ever and a day. He then departed for his castle, where he is at this present speaking (having just gone there after a visit to Clere) busy at his great book, "The History of Fanatics and Fanaticism, from Mahomet to Joe Smith." Beloved by all who come in contact with him; happy, honoured, and prosperous, as he so well deserves to be.

But I used to go and see everything that was to be seen, though, having no companion (for Sam was down at Clere, putting his house in order), it was very wretched work. I *did*, in fact, all the public amusements in London, and, as a matter of course, found myself one night, about eleven o'clock, at Evans's in Covent Garden.

The place was crowded to suffocation, but I got a place at a table about half-way up, opposite an old gentleman who had been drinking a good deal of brandy and water, and was wanting some more. Next me was an

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honest-looking young fellow enough, and opposite him his friend. These two looked like shop-lads, out for a "spree."

A tall old gentleman made me buy some cigars, with such an air of condescending goodwill, that I was encouraged to stop a waiter and humbly ask for a glass of whiskey and water. He was kind enough to bring it for me; so I felt more at ease, and prepared to enjoy myself.

A very gentlemanly-looking man sang us a song, so unutterably funny that we were dissolved in inextinguishable laughter; and then, from behind a curtain, began to come boys in black, one after another, as the imps in a pantomime come from a place I dare not mention, to chase the clown to his destruction. I counted twelve of them and grew dizzy. They ranged themselves in a row, with their hands behind them, and began screeching Tennyson's "Miller's Daughter" with such a maximum of shrillness, and such a minimum of expression, that I began to think that tailing wild cattle on the mountains, at midnight, in a thunderstorm, with my boots full of water, was a far preferable situation to my present one.

They finished. Thank goodness. Ah! delusive hope. The drunken old miscreant opposite me got up an encore with the bottom of his tumbler, and we had it all over again. Who can tell my delight when he broke his glass applauding, and the waiter came down on him sharp, and made him pay for it. I gave that waiter sixpence on the spot.

Then came some capital singing, which I really enjoyed; and then came a remarkable adventure; "an adventure!" you say; "and at Evans's!" My dear sir, do you suppose that, at a moment like this, when I am pressed for space, and just coming to the end of my story;—do you suppose that, at a moment like this, I would waste your time at a singing-house for nothing?

A tall, upright looking man passed up the lane between

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the tables, and almost touched me as he passed. I did not catch his face, but there was something so *distingué* about him that I watched him. He had his hat off, and was smoothing down his close-cropped hair, and appeared to be looking for a seat. As he was just opposite to us, one of the young clerks leant over to the other, and said,—

“That is——.” I did not catch what he said.

“By George,” said the other lad. “Is it now?”

“That’s *him*, sir,” said the first one, with a slight disregard of grammar.

The new comer was walking slowly up the room, and there began to arise a little breeze of applause, and then some one called out, “Three cheers for the Inkerman pet,” and then there was a stamping of feet, and a little laughter and cheering, in various parts of the room; but the new comer made one bow and walked on.

“Pray, sir,” said I, bending over to one of those who had spoken before, “who is that gentleman?”

He had no need to tell me. The man we spoke of reached the orchestra and turned round. It was Jim Brentwood!

There was a great white seam down his face, and he wore a pair of light curling moustachios, but I knew him in a moment; and, when he faced round to the company, I noticed that his person seemed known to the public, for there was not a little applause with the bottoms of tumblers, not unlike what one remembers at certain banquets I have been at, with certain brethren, Sons of Apollo.

In one moment we were standing face to face, shaking one another by both hands; in another, we were arm in arm, walking through the quiet streets towards Jim’s lodgings. He had been in Ireland with his regiment, as I knew, which accounted for my not having seen him. And that night, Major Brentwood recounted to me all his part in the last great campaign, from the first fierce rush up

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the hill at the Alma, down to the time when our Lady pinned a certain bit of gun metal on his coat in St. James's Park.

A few days after this, Jim and I were standing together on the platform of the Wildmoor station, on the South-Western Railway, and a couple of porters were carrying our portmanteaus towards a pair-horse phaeton, in which stood Sam Buckley, shouting to us to come on, for the horses wouldn't stand. So, in a moment, I was alongside of Sam in the front seat, with Jim standing up behind, between the grooms, and leaning over between us, to see after Sam's driving; and away we went along a splendid road, across a heath, at what seemed to me a rather dangerous pace.

"Let them go, my child," said Jim to Sam, "you've got a fair mile before you. You sit at your work in capital style. Give me time and I'll teach you to drive, Sam. How do you like this, Uncle Jeff?"

I said, "That's more than I can tell you, Master Jim. I know so little of your wheeled vehicles that I am rather alarmed."

"Ah!" said Jim, "you should have been in Calcutta when the O'Rourke and little Charley Badminton tried to drive a pair of fresh imported Australians tandem through the town. Red Maclean and I looked out of the billiard-room, and we saw the two horses go by with a bit of a shaft banging about the wheeler's hocks. So we ran and found Charley, with his head broke, standing in the middle of the street, mopping the blood off his forehead. 'Charley,' says I, 'how the deuce did this happen?' 'We met an elephant,' says he, in a faint voice."

"Have you heard anything of the Mayfords lately?" said Jim.

"You know Ellen is married?" said Sam.

"No! Is she?" I said. "And pray to whom?"

"The Squire of Monkspool," he answered. "A very fine young fellow, and clever withal."

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"Did old Mrs. Mayford," asked Jim, "ever recover her reason before she died?"

"Never, poor soul," said Sam. "To the last she refused to see my mother, believing that the rivalry between Cecil and myself in some way led to his death. She was never sane after that dreadful morning."

And so with much pleasant talk we beguiled the way, till I saw, across a deep valley on our right, a line of noble heights, well timbered, but broken into open grassy glades, and smooth sheets of bright green lawn. Between us and these hills flowed a gleaming river, from which a broad avenue led up to the eye of the picture, a noble grey stone mansion, a mass of turrets, gables, and chimneys, which the afternoon sun was lighting up right pleasantly.

"That is the finest seat I have seen yet, Sam," I said. "Whose is that?"

"That," said Sam, "is Clere. My house and your home, old friend."

Swiftly up under the shadow of the elm avenue, past the herds of dappled deer, up to the broad gravelled terrace which ran along in front of the brave old house. And there beneath the dark wild porch, above the group of servants that stood upon the steps to receive their master, was Alice, with her son and daughter beside her, waiting to welcome us, with the happy sunlight on her face.

* * * * *

I bought a sweet cottage, barely a mile from Clere, with forty acres of grass-land round it, and every convenience suited for an old bachelor of my moderate though comfortable means.

I took to fishing, and to the breeding of horses on a small scale, and finding that I could make myself enormously busy with these occupations, and as much hunting as I wanted, I became very comfortable, and considered myself settled.

I had plenty of society, the best in the land. Above all men I was the honoured guest at Clere, and as the county

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had rallied round Sam with acclamation, I saw and enjoyed to the fullest extent that charming English country-life, the like of which, I take it, no other country can show.

I was a great favourite, too, with old Miss Gertrude Talbot at the castle. Her admiration and love for Sam and his wife was almost equal to mine. So we never bored one another, and so, by degrees, gaining the old lady's entire confidence, I got entrusted with a special mission of a somewhat peculiar character.

The leading desire of this good old woman's life was, that her sister Agnes should come back with her husband, the Major, and take possession of the castle. Again, Alice could not be content, unless her father could be induced to come back and take up his residence at Clere. And letters having failed to produce the desired effect in both instances, the Major saying that he was quite comfortable where he was, and the Captain urging that the English winters would be too rigorous for his constitution; under these circumstances, I say, I, the *confidant* of the family, within fifteen months of landing at Plymouth, found myself in a hot omnibus with a Mahomedan driver, jolting and bumping over the desert of Suez on my way back to Australia, charged to bring the old folks home, or never show my face again.

And it was after this journey that the scene described in the first chapter of this book took place; when I read aloud to them from the roll of manuscript mentioned there, my recollections of all that had happened to us during so many years. But since I have come back to England, these "Recollections" have been very much enlarged and improved by the assistance of Major Buckley, Agnes, and Captain Brentwood.

For I succeeded in my object, and brought them back in triumph through the Red Sea, across the Isthmus of Suez, and so by way of the Mediterranean, the Bay of Biscay, the English Channel, Southampton Water, the

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South-Western Railway, and Alice's new dark-blue barouche, safe and sound to Clere and the castle, where they all are at present speaking, unless some of them are gone out a-walking.

As for Tom Troubridge and Mary, they are so exceedingly happy and prosperous, that they are not worth talking about. They will come either by the Swiftsure or the Norfolk, and we have got their rooms ready for them. They say that their second child, the boy, is one of the finest riders in the colony.

"You have forgotten some one after all," says the reader after due examination. "A man we took some little interest in. It is not much matter though, we shall be glad when you have done."

Is this the man you mean?

I am sitting in Sam's "den" at Clere. He is engaged in receiving the "afterdavy" of a man who got his head broke by a tinker at the cricket-match in the park (for Sam is in the commission, and sits on the bench once a month "a perfect Midas," as Mrs. Wattlegum would say). I am busy rigging up one of these wonderful new Yankee spoons with a view to killing a villanous pike, who has got into the trout-water. I have just tied on the thirty-ninth hook, and have got the fortieth ready in my fingers, when a footman opens the door, and says to me,—

"If you please, sir, your stud-groom would be glad to see you."

I keep two horses of all work and a grey pony, so that the word "stud" before the word "groom" in the last sentence must be taken to refer to my little farm, on which I rear a few colts annually.

"May he come in, Sam?" I ask.

"Of course! uncle Jeff," says he.

And so there comes a little old man, dressed in the extreme of that peculiar dandyism which is affected by retired jockeys and trainers, and which I have seen since attempted, with indifferent success, by a few young gentle-

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men at our great universities. He stands in the door and says,—

“ Mr. Plowden has offered forty pound for the dark chestnut colt, sir.”

“ Dick,” I say (mark that if you please), “ Dick, I think he may have the brute.”

And so, my dear reader, I must at last bid you heartily farewell. I am not entirely without hope that we may meet again.

THE END.

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